

Foreign Service Spouse Series

JANE BYINGTON

Interviewed by: Margaret Sullivan

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Q: [You were] going to tell me something about the Lindbergh case and how that relates to modern terrorism.

BYINGTON: Well, I wouldn't have thought of it if you hadn't mentioned trying to teach a twelve-year old about kidnapping. This takes me back two generations. I was carefully told, living here in Washington, never to get into a car while walking to school if anybody offered me a ride. Under any circumstances, I was to say "no." That was simple. I don't remember that I was particularly told why not to do it. I was abroad at the time of the Lindbergh kidnapping and came back with a small child and a nurse. My parents greeted us at the dock. My father took one look with horror at the nurse and said, "For God's sake get her out of that uniform; you're an absolute target for kidnapping."

Q: And this was what it was like to come back as a young Foreign Service wife.

BYINGTON: With a child, with a nurse so that I could enjoy coming to parties here at the Sulgrave and so on, and being told that the nurse must be gotten out of uniform, because it was a target for kidnapping.

Q: So some of it hasn't changed...

BYINGTON: No.

Q: I think that ... another thing that's fascinating is that some of these kinds of things, while they become more apparent at certain periods, haven't changed all that much.

BYINGTON: Kidnapping, in the U.S., I think perhaps is connected with the lawlessness that grew up out of the bootlegging generation. Certainly nowhere else that we lived did we personally, as Americans, feel in danger of kidnapping - of other things, yes, but not kidnapping.

Q: What did you feel in danger of?

BYINGTON: Bomb throwing in Havana.

Q: In what years?

BYINGTON: 1932. Bombs were thrown while we were in the movies. Bombs were thrown at the apartment house we lived in - not at us, but just part of the general counter-Machado, at that time, activities. And Machado in the due course was over-thrown by... Baptista?

Q: I'd have to check that.

BYINGTON: Yes, and Baptista was over-thrown by...

Q: Castro.

BYINGTON: Castro. For a brief period somewhere in there, there was a president that was not a dictator, but he only lasted a year. I couldn't tell you his name.

Q: You were born in Washington and grew up...

BYINGTON: No, I was born in New York. I think you could skip all that.

Q: Well, let's start with how you joined the Foreign Service - in the loose sense of the word.  
[laughter]

BYINGTON: Well, on and off for a period of years my parents wintered here and...

Q: Here meaning Washington?



BYINGTON: Here meaning Washington, and everybody of my generation says, "Oh how Washington has changed." Certainly it has changed far more than any of the older capitals of the world. In my time it was inevitable that you met young Foreign Service officers, even those training. They went to a school called Crawford - you really ought to get other people's remembrances of Crawford - who prepped them for the exams. And so in the due course of events, I met my husband, having met Harry Lewis long before. And in the due course of events we got married. There was nothing particularly odd about that. It was the same pattern with Elfie and Burke [Elbrick]. Some of my acquaintances married foreign diplomats, but that was the core of Washington's social life fifty, sixty years ago.

Q: Were you working here in Washington?

BYINGTON: No, studying.

Q: Where were you studying?

BYINGTON: I went to law school.

Q: Were you expecting to practice law?

BYINGTON: Yes.

Q: And did you finish law school?

BYINGTON: Well, I got married instead of joining the firm that I [a] had job at.

Q: And that was also sort of the normal course of events at that point - that if one were married, one didn't consider being a lawyer.

BYINGTON: Well, possibly there were some fields that one could have continued in, in a foreign post, but it's practically impossible to practice law abroad. If you've studied in the District of Columbia you also get some law as it's used in Virginia, but you can't just pack your suitcase and go practice in New York. I think the same is true probably in medicine. You have to take the examination in the state where you plan to practice. In fact I know it's true. I have a brother-in-law who practices in New York City and lives in Connecticut and he can't practice in Connecticut even if it's an emergency night call. He can go out and put a bandage on an accident, but he can't treat patients.

Q: I guess the question I would ask is did you think twice? Was, is it a question in your mind whether you wanted to be a Foreign Service... be married to your husband and therefore follow in the Foreign Service, or be a lawyer?

BYINGTON: Well, in my particular case there was no question. One, I wanted to be married, and two, I was delighted with the idea of being away. I didn't have the slightest feeling that my life was about to become limited nor was it in any way, shape or form limited.

Q: That's what I wanted you to say [laughs]. He joined the Foreign Service in 1930, and he was already in the Foreign Service when you met him.

BYINGTON: And posted in Havana.

Q: And you were married...

BYINGTON: In '32 and went to Havana.

Q: What was the kind of life when you went there as a bride? You were twenty.

BYINGTON: Did you record that bit about dictators or not?

Q: Bomb throwing, yes.

BYINGTON: Yes. Provided you minded your "p"s and "q"s, you were perfectly safe there. We never wandered off into the countryside alone. The day before I arrived, there had been the funeral of some important politician at which all of the diplomatic corps attended and by a miracle the bomb planted in the graveyard went off after the funeral instead of during it, so the diplomatic corps was not wiped out. Well, to begin with, when one's young I don't think you worry so much about what's going to happen. You're sure it isn't going to happen to you.

Q: What was sort of the routine of being a very young, very junior Foreign Service wife in a post like Havana? You arrived. You were a bride.



BYINGTON: Well, at this point you've got to have just a little idea of the organization of the Service at that time. Most men's first assignments were limited to about a year or a year and a half, so you knew you were not going to stay at that post very long; and therefore, you didn't have the same - I say you; I didn't have the same - feeling of particularly trying to put down any roots in Havana. I think that's probably true of most of us. We knew we were going to be there such a short time, that it was more a question of "let's enjoy it while we're here."

Q: You did make the routine calls and observe this sort of thing, or is that overdrawn?

BYINGTON: It's overdrawn in the sense of its importance and how much time it consumed. If two of you get in a car and run around it's fairly easy to leave all those little pieces of pasteboard in a half, three-quarters of an hour. And obviously a junior officer's wife only called on your own Service; you didn't go call on the other diplomats. I assume that I left cards at the Embassy. The ambassador then was one of the Guggenheim family, as far as I know, never in residence the entire time I was there. The chargé<sup>1/2</sup> was a man named Reed whose wife was one of a Washingtonian real estate firm with whom I lunched at one time. Naturally I called on the Consul General's wife, and she is a story unto herself. They were charming to us, notoriously difficult. In fact when my father-in-law, who was then Chief of Personnel, assigned his son to Havana, people asked him, "Good Lord why do you send him to the vice consul killer?"

Q: When you say "notoriously difficult", without [laughter] saying what you wouldn't want to see in print, how would you describe that so that someone else could understand it? I think I know what you mean.

BYINGTON: Well, I called, and I was duly invited to tea, and then I was told by Mrs. Dumont that she expected me to stop by every afternoon and my husband on the way home from work could pick me up. She also expected us to come every Saturday night for dinner and play bridge. So I went home, torn between storms of anger and storms of weeping and said I was taking the next ship back to the U.S. That was not for me. And my husband said, "Now stop and think if you're bright enough to rearrange this to suit yourself."

So I thought it over and duly went back to tea, and made a beautiful sob story about how my husband and I were just married and we were living on a shoestring, all of which was true, and he was so devoted to his work that we never went out on weeknights and Saturday night was our only night to indulge ourselves. And it was obviously a well-done story because she said, "Oh my darling, of course, and I never thought about that. What would be a nice night for you?" And I said, "Well Thursday night is the night we don't have a cook." [laughter]



She said, "Of course, I never thought of that. Why I have this whole staff of Chinese. You will come on Thursday nights." So duly on Thursday nights we went and played bridge and had a very good dinner and it was no effort at all. But you had to know how to handle Mrs. Dumont. There probably are not too many left around who remember the Dumonts. And they should be recorded.

He had been an important executive in the Pennsylvania Railroad before World War I and was during the war in charge of military transportation in France. Whether he actually took over the running of the French railroads from the French government, those details I don't know. But when the war was over, he was then, I suppose, a man in his fifties, and why he yearned to join the Foreign Service, I don't know. But he obviously came in at a top rank. They had no children and he was an extremely able man, also very fair but very - I suppose I might say - intolerant of stupidity.

One other illustration of the type of man he was: He belonged to the New York Yacht Club, which is probably one of the more distinguished in the U.S., or was at that time, and therefore he was automatically invited to join the Havana Yacht Club. However, the Havana Yacht Club did not accept members from the Consular Service, only the diplomats, whereupon Mr. Dumont said, "I would not be seen in any club where the officers who work with me are unacceptable," and withdrew his membership from the Havana Yacht Club. Now that is an act of generosity and courage.

Q: It is. I'm curious... I thought that the Diplomatic Service and the Consular Service had been joined in our Service some time before that with the Foreign Service Act of '24.

BYINGTON: Well, what you referred to is the Rogers Act of 1924. Again, I suggest Stewart's book on the State Department. And as another sideline on that amalgamation, Ambassador Grew, Under Secretary Grew's memoirs are quite explicit [Joseph C. Grew, Ambassador to Japan and Under Secretary of State]. However, whatever the United States prefers to make as laws in its own country have nothing to do with other countries. When we went to Italy after Havana, members of the Embassy in Rome were allowed to import liquor and cigarettes. There was no such thing as the commissary. [laughs] I don't want to get started on that. The consuls of the United States accredited in Italy were not allowed to import. Now that had nothing to do with the American government's conception of who a consul was. This had to do with Italian laws. Diplomats could, and consuls couldn't.

Q: And that was that?



BYINGTON: And that was that. I honestly don't think we suffered very greatly. I have smoked something called Trestelle, and we did a certain amount of smuggling off the ships that called, but suffer we did not.

Q: Before we go further into your own lives, what I would like to do is ask you what it was like to marry into a family which had a Foreign Service history and where your father-in-law was the Chief of Personnel. This must have been an interesting sort of extra twist to the business.

BYINGTON: Of course, at the time, I didn't realize that it was different from any one of the other wives that I knew. Certainly, my father-in-law's one, reminiscences of his time, and two, the friends or colleagues with whom he was working here in Washington were in and out of the house discussing a great many things that - when I say I overheard, it wasn't a question of any secrecy. It was just day-to-day things they were discussing, which I now realize I was certainly inside to how the things worked.

Q: Well, let's stop then and maybe you could tell me some about how it did work in the years that your father-in-law was running it - as you understood it from what you heard.

BYINGTON: In order to do this, I really wish I had more exact knowledge, but going back to the Rogers Act of 1924, that amalgamated the two American services... Just how the diplomats were appointed... I'm not certain what sort of examinations they had or whether they were entirely personally appointed because of knowing someone. I honestly don't know. The Consular Service had an examination.

Q: This is before '24?

BYINGTON: This is before '24. The first career consuls were appointed in about 1900, 1902, and there were five or six of them, of whom my father-in-law was one, and they were promised a thousand dollars a year for life. That was fairly good money in 1900. However, they had no expenses, no living allowance, no travel allowance, but that wasn't important. After the Rogers Act - and there were several shifts in how many people were to be on the personnel board, and whether it was to be the Assistant Secretary - but immediately after that act, the diplomatic group felt that all of the promotions, or most of the promotions, in the amalgamated service had been given to consular officers, and there was considerable acrimony about the whole thing. And in 1928, my father-in-law was appointed Chief of Personnel. The Assistant Secretary of State for Administration (I'm not sure it was called "administration" then) was a man named Wilbur J. Carr. And the new promotion board was set up.



From what I've heard over the years, it was felt that my father-in-law administered the whole service in a very fair way, although he himself had never had a diplomatic post per se. I think more weight was put on the inspectors' reports rather than the principal officers' reports. I do know that the principal officers' reports were completely confidential and were not seen by anybody except the promotion boards and the inspectors. And it was the inspectors' comments on the principal officers' comments that perhaps carried the most weight.

Q: "I think this one was a good report...that this was a fair assessment, and this was not a good assessment." That sort of thing?

BYINGTON: Or, frequently, an inspector would say, "Well, because of this or that problem at the post, X really has not fairly evaluated Y." O(they used to call my father-in-law "Chief"), "Remember that John Doe in Salonica is a protĳ½gĳ½ of so and so, and therefore he's not going to like Billy Willy."

Q: It was a small enough Foreign Service at that time that everybody knew almost everybody or knew of...

BYINGTON: Yes, they didn't know each other, but the administration of personnel was something that was personal. It wasn't a computer. Very personal.

Q: How did they look at wives in that? Because, later, wives came to be evaluated. Certainly, when I started out, wives were.

BYINGTON: Wives were evaluated then very definitely. Again, my own personal feeling is that inspectors' reports were extremely important. Every inspection that we had, I had a personal interview with the inspector. I was encouraged to discuss anything I wished to bring up, and I was told where I was being troublesome.

Q: So that there was a pattern that they expected wives to follow? Maybe that's not the right way to put it.

BYINGTON: No. Again, my personal feeling, judging from the younger wives that I knew in the last ten years of our service, we were a much more individualistic group.

Q: As young women?



BYINGTON: As young women, than the young women of today. We didn't do the same things. We weren't particularly chummy with each other.

Q: Then when they said a wife was being troublesome, what did they mean by being troublesome?

BYINGTON: Well, I knew what they meant in my case.

Q: Would you mind sharing?

BYINGTON: We happened to have on our staff an officer, not particularly younger than we, and a wife, and they were both persons I didn't care for for two reasons. They both drank, and they rowed with each other and I simply refused, blankly, to have them in my house.

Q: I can appreciate that [laughs].

BYINGTON: And the inspector felt that this was disruptive to the, as it was, to the general social functioning of the post.

Q: Your husband was the consul at that point.

BYINGTON: No, no, he was... I don't want to say where it was, because I don't want to...

Q: All right. He wasn't the senior person?

BYINGTON: He wasn't the senior person. But he was senior to these people I didn't care for.

Q: And they worked for him, or he...

BYINGTON: Yes, they were on the staff of the office. I might equally well say that that particular inspector who admonished me did not like my father-in-law at all so I weighed his admonitions against my knowledge that he and my father-in-law did not get on. As it's past, I can say that. Those are the things that one could know in those days.

Q: Easier than now?

BYINGTON: I think almost impossible to know now. There's no way of knowing who anybody is. We had then a book that was published by the Department which was a biography of everybody and their wives. It probably... It was not published, I think, after the war, but at that time you could look anybody up. You could find out where they were born, whom they'd married, what their posts had been, what their grades were. So you knew about a new arrival before they arrived.

Q: Was there training for wives at that point?

BYINGTON: Well, not that I ever participated in other than languages.

Q: What about Miss Bassell?

BYINGTON: Who?

Q: Miss Bis...B...oh, Bassell.

BYINGTON: Miss Bassell. Well, again I happened to have known her before I was married, so she didn't particularly... She was the sister-in-law of a Senator Carter Glass. She was an old Virginian. She lived at the National Democratic Club which was around the corner here on New Hampshire, I don't know if it's still there.

Q: It is. It's still one of the best, big brick buildings in town.

BYINGTON: She used to advise young officers. Well, backtrack just a minute, in those... In the days that I began in the Service, after a man had been appointed, he usually was sent to the field immediately and again, usually, nearby posts - Canada, Cuba - for about a year, a year and a half. I mentioned that as regards Havana. And he usually was not married, because if he were married, the Department did not pay for his wife to go to the post.

Then he was brought back and went to what was called "the School" here in Washington, for about three months, and Miss Bassell could not have been the director of the school, but certainly was an advisor to the school in one way or other, and she told the young men what they should or should not do socially. But I don't think she ever officially indoctrinated wives in the sense of there being classes or anything of that sort. She often invited young couples to come over and play bridge, or have dinner with her, or she'd invite a group of wives to have lunch with her. But I don't think that it was ever, as I say, part of a course for women.



We did have in those days a wives' club. Again, I think it was purely unofficial or voluntary, and it met about once a month for lunch. Most people knew everybody else at it. If you didn't, you soon met them. If you were on home leave here and stopped in Washington and it was meeting, you usually went, because you saw old friends. But, again, I feel that it was not organized the way the Foreign Service Association is today.

It was fun. We used to have various arguments about where to have it, because we tried to keep it down to a reasonable cost, and the problem, if we had it out in Olney - which was the favorite place then - that often raised transportation difficulties for people who were simply passing through. Olney cost less. Occasionally we could persuade one of the large hotels to give us a cut-rate. I don't remember that we did any "welfare work." It was purely social.

Q: Did it have officers and that much structure to it, or not?

BYINGTON: Yes, because we had a treasurer, and we had a secretary who always wanted some kind of help to get out the notices and keep the membership list.

Q: [laughs] Things don't change very much, do they?

BYINGTON: I don't remember voting for officers. I think they were perhaps more informally named. I honestly don't remember. It didn't seem to be awfully important. It was never a group in which there were deep divisions or factions.

Q: And it was purely social? It didn't deal with... It didn't either do welfare work in the community or "political work?"

BYINGTON: No, not at all. I think it probably did do, in a purely voluntary way, assistance to newcomers. There was a desk in the - then we were in Old State. There was a desk that had lists of where to rent, or Foreign Service, particularly Foreign Service, people who wanted to rent their houses either for a long period or a short period. They gave assistance about, or advice rather, about schools, about general things of that sort.

And also, they were helpful about mail. Now I'm not quite certain how that worked. But if you knew that you were coming back to the U.S., you could have your mail sent to this desk and they would hold it for you. Or, if you wanted mail sent abroad via the pouch - I don't know whether that's permitted today or not - you did it through this desk.

Q: It still is.

BYINGTON: It still...? And some of the wives helped that. But again, I don't remember that anyone was pressured into doing it.

Q: Just that that person was so inclined and did.

BYINGTON: Did, yes.

Q: Was your mother-in-law a factor in any of this? You've talked about your father-in-law.

BYINGTON: You mean to me personally or to the Foreign Service?

Q: Let's start with what she did with the Foreign Service, and then let's talk about her in relation to you.

BYINGTON: I don't think that she was particularly active in the Foreign Service per se. My mother-in-law was a very intelligent, charming person, but she was not gregarious. She was certainly not intimate with masses of people. I don't think that she had any effect whatsoever on the Foreign Service or wives in it.

Q: She'd go to the lunches?

BYINGTON: Oh yes. She went to the lunches indeed. She lived in her own world so that she could be charming, pleasant, and as far as she was concerned what had happened had no effect on her. She herself was a Foreign Service wife for forty-odd years and had good friends, but not in a gregarious way.

Q: What sort of advice did she have for you when you started? Or did she?

BYINGTON: Absolutely none. She never... I don't remember that she ever gave me any advice at all about anything.

Q: The perfect mother-in-law.



BYINGTON: Absolutely. My own parents both died when I was relatively young. I was perhaps - I'm just trying to think - twenty-three. Yes, I was twenty-nine when my mother died. In any case, all of our home leaves, all of our holidays were always spent with my in-laws even after they retired. And my father-in-law always kept up his interest in the Service. All sorts of people came to see him in retirement.

And I saw the article in the State Department magazine just before I left Spain, which was about William Dean Howells [19th century author] as a consul. My great-grandfather-in-law had been a newspaper man and had scooped the Battle of Gettysburg. Some years ago, it would have been the hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, the New York Tribune [not then the Herald Tribune] just the Tribune, ran an article that was afterwards a television program, called "Who is Byington?" because my great grandfather-in-law's message about the battle was the first news that taken to President Lincoln, and President Lincoln turned and said, "Well, who is Byington?" And the then Secretary of War - I do not know his name, but it's easy enough to find out - was from Connecticut and therefore did know who my great-grandfather-in-law was.

Well, we go on a number of years and this man - he was A. Homer Byington - he was offered the consulship of Naples and he was then a man over his seventies. And his sons simply were up in the air about this and more or less said, "Well, Dad, you've never been abroad. You don't speak Italian. What are you doing with this wild idea?" But go he would, and he was persuaded to take with him his eighteen-year-old grandson, who was my father-in-law.

In those days, as it said in the William Dean Howells article, the consul collected the fees and paid the expenses. So he hired his son - his grandson - as his clerk. And off they went to Naples. And my father-in-law was then eighteen. It was about three or four years after that that... It was during President Theodore Roosevelt's time that the first act creating a career Consular Service was enacted by Congress. And my father-in-law took the... such exams as they gave, and was one of the first five or six appointed. So from 1897 until my husband retired, there was always a Byington in the Service.

Q: Your son was in the Foreign Service for a short while.

BYINGTON: Yes, and my brother-in-law.

Q: So that that's five of them altogether. Four ...Five.

BYINGTON: Great-grandfather.



Q: Father-in-law.

BYINGTON: Father-in-law, husband, son, and brother-in-law.

Q: Five at one time or another.

BYINGTON: Five at one time or another. Our son served during the period my husband was serving, but not afterwards.

Q: What's he doing now?

BYINGTON: He's an international banker. And wants to retire.

Q: [laughs] There's more money in that.

BYINGTON: That is a sideline on Foreign Service life. My husband was born in Naples, after his father had become a career consul. He was born in 1908. So that was all right. He was an American citizen. And when our son was born, he was immediately registered at the Consulate.

Q: He was also born in Naples.

BYINGTON: Born in Naples, and registered at the Consulate, and as far as the U.S. government was concerned there was no question but what he was an American citizen. But some years later we were passing through Naples - going I can't remember where - and we went out to see our old house, and the gatekeeper rushed out waving a piece of paper in front of us, so glad to see us, and this piece of paper was calling our son up to do his Italian military service as an Italian citizen. It so happened at the time he was serving in the U.S. Army in Germany. My husband immediately got in touch with friends in the foreign office in Rome and the matter was straightened out, but they said to my husband, "Don't ever let this happen again, because your son is the son of a native-born Italian, and therefore your son is a native-born Italian - born in Italy of a father born in Italy and he's got to be an Italian."

Q: I remember hearing at the time your son was then assigned to Naples.

BYINGTON: No, he was subsequently assigned to Genoa.



Q: All right, but Italy anyway.

BYINGTON: In Italy, and told he must never have a son born in Italy. When his son was born, they were in the U.S. so...

Q: [laughs] That solved the problem. Is there anything more you want to say about the family before we go on back to...

BYINGTON: No.

Q: As it comes up?

BYINGTON: As it comes up, yes.

Q: After you'd been in Havana for, what, less than a year from the look of it. Six months?

BYINGTON: I was only there about six months. My husband was there about a year.

Q: You came home and he went to school for three months?

BYINGTON: He went to school for three months. The school was known as the "married school" and we even had a baby born at the school. It just happened to be that they picked up all the men who had been married, and therefore hadn't been called into the school earlier.

Q: And it was your baby that was born at the school?

BYINGTON: No.

Q: You mean someone else's.

BYINGTON: Someone else's. I've forgotten now who, but during that time. We gave it a cup.

Q: And then you went to Italy.

BYINGTON: And then we went to Naples.



Q: And you were there for six years.

BYINGTON: Yes, we went in '33 and left in '39. Yes.

Q: What was it like in those days?

BYINGTON: Well, that's an awfully big question.

Q: Let's start with what was it like to manage a house there, since the first thing you did was to set up a household, I presume.

BYINGTON: I found it no problem at all, but I have to say honestly, I'm a fairly good manager. Seems to me that was the least of my concerns.

Q: What was it then that you were concerned about?

BYINGTON: Well, I can't remember that I worried seriously about anything, but for a while we didn't have a phone, but once we got a phone... For instance, we all knew never, never, never to speak of anything confidential on the phone. All the phones were tapped. It was taken for granted that they would be.

Well, it was certainly a very interesting pre-war period. There was the abortive German attempt to take over Austria. Italy rushed troops up to the border and the take-over was not carried out. At that time Italy was still neutral. Then there was the Ethiopian war and as I remember at the time, there's no doubt that the mass of the Italians felt that they were justified in Ethiopia. There were sanctions which had no affect whatsoever. If I remember rightly, Eden was the English Foreign Minister. He pushed Italy into its eventual pro-German position.

Then there was the Spanish Civil War, which the Italian government supported. That, contrary to the Ethiopian war, was not supported by the mass of the Italian people in any way, to the extent that when the hospital ships returned from Spain, they had to land at night in order that the people would not know how many wounded there were. It also provided those of us who bothered to think about it with an example of what was going to happen.



The Spanish consul, charming man, and his wife supported the Republican government and therefore had to resign and were left stranded in Italy, absolutely penniless. And I would say many, many of the consular corps - I'm not talking now just about the Americans - rallied to raise funds for them.

I don't know what happened to them in the end. Their position, which in later years I learned was that of many other people, was that they had entered a service and taken an oath to a government. They certainly were not communists themselves, but they felt they had to support the properly elected government. As I say, I don't have any idea what happened to them. Very shortly after that we went to Belgrade. I do remember the Munich Crisis.

Q: Where were you when that...

BYINGTON: We were still in Naples then. I can remember meeting with Italian friends night after night in those three or four days and wondering what was going to happen the next day, and our profound relief that we hadn't all gone to war. But everybody knowing that all we'd done was postpone - I say "we," the world. All that had happened was the inevitable. It did postpone for a little while. Nobody thought it wasn't going to happen. Naples was of course a beautiful post - with interest. Anybody could find something to do: archeology, geology.

Q: What did you spend a lot of your time doing?

BYINGTON: Well, I certainly happen to literally adore history so I couldn't get enough. There was so much there that you didn't even begin to have to think of what was happening in some other part of the world. And of course I studied Italian.

Q: Did you follow history on your own, or were you a part of a group? I'm assuming you're meaning history in the early Roman history sense, or are you also meaning paying very close attention to current events, or both?

BYINGTON: Both and all. Don't get me started on history, because you'll never hear the end of it. You just have to take it for granted that I went to some courses at the University of Naples. I did vast amounts of reading on my own. I tended to probe for information from any historian that came wandering around. More so in later years as I had more opportunity to meet distinguished historians. Just take it for granted that everywhere I happened to go I...

Q: That was the thing you did. Did being a consular wife take up a good bit of your time or were you free to do -pursue your own interests to a large measure?



BYINGTON: Again, as I haven't been active in the Service in, what is it, fifteen years, I'm not exactly sure, beyond reading the State Department Bulletin, how posts are organized today. Certainly we were not organized. We didn't have women's lunches. We didn't... Occasionally, we met for lunch.

Q: You were...

BYINGTON:...expected to be helpful at official functions. I don't think it ever occurred to most of us that we wouldn't be. Some of us were able to do it more easily. Others were not - how should I put it - socially...

Q: Some have the gift and some don't.

BYINGTON: Just as a mild illustration. I can remember somewhere along the way that at large receptions, if I saw people standing in the corner looking a bit stranded, I was to go up to them and say who I was; that I was Jane Byington, and that I was on the staff; were they enjoying their visit to Naples or whatever other place I might have been; was there something they would like to see, and could I introduce them to someone, and to lead them gently over to some other group and say, "This is Mr. Brown from Milwaukee. He's here attempting to negotiate buying hemp" (or whatever it might be) and try to keep groups moving, not let them be isolating. But it wasn't something that was so difficult that you had to stay awake at night thinking about it. Naturally as we progressed up to higher ranks, we were called in more often to be of assistance, but...

There was a difference between serving under a career officer who, shall we say, knew the ropes having gone through it themselves, and serving under outside appointees, who in their private lives had had large staffs paid by either their corporations or their political offices, and who tended to expect more personal care and feeding of themselves. The career officer didn't think that you were going to help them do their personal shopping except perhaps in an emergency. The political appointee tended to think, not always, that the staff was at their beck and call the same way it would be in their office in the U.S.

Q: And in that they included wives.

BYINGTON: Probably included wives in a way they wouldn't have in the U.S. I don't know about corporations in the U.S. except through daughters-in-law. They included wives simply because wives were more visible in the Foreign Service.



Q: And did the consul's wife in Naples, or did the successive consuls' wives in Naples sort of say, "You will come Thursday night to dinner and play bridge," in the same way it happened in Havana?

BYINGTON: No. That's because the Dumonts...Well, we were lucky in that almost all of our chiefs were persons of rather unique characteristics and abilities. Our first chief in Naples was Coert duBois, who had served under my father-in-law at one point. They were charming, enchanting, individualistic, highly intelligent people, and any moments one could possibly have with them were treasured moments. Never a bore and never a chore. But that's because they themselves were outstanding people. If Margaret duBois wanted me to come down and join in her Italian classes, I was delighted. It would have made it far more interesting then. He and my husband used to go off on weekend sails in his sailboat and had a marvelous time. But again, as I said a little earlier, my general impression is that we were, as a whole in the Service, more individualistic that we are today.

Q: Where would you say then, just to follow this on, that the notion which was certainly prevalent by the time I came into the Foreign Service....

BYINGTON: When did you...

Q: Kuala Lumpur (KL) was our first post and so that would have been at the end of the '50's. There was certainly a notion that there was a great deal expected and a system that sort of imposed itself on wives and what they would do, and where they would go, and, to a degree, how they would dress. And those of us who tended to be somewhat individualistic were quietly, and not so quietly, told not to be so individualistic. I remember that happening. How would you say that developed if the pre-war Foreign Service seemed to have in it a place for individualism?

BYINGTON: Let's take K. L. as a starting point, it's as good a point as any. When I got there - I had only been there a few days - I was invited to come to a morning coffee the wives' group had organized as part of my arriving, and - well, naturally everybody was very nice to me - and we sat around and chit-chatted. I remember masses of chocolate cake. I edicted - that is the correct word - that there would be no more coffee parties.



I think I probably talked to each wife individually and explained my reason, that I felt that coffee parties were a waste of time, and that I didn't think that any organized project by all the wives was going to have much success. I strongly urged every wife to take up something that interested her. Two or three of the wives said, "Thank goodness, because I've been asked to do this or that or the other thing." And I said, "For heaven's sakes go do it. I would like to have every wife do something along whatever lines they choose." Were the Chases there when you got there?

Q: Yes, and Betty was, is one of my marvelous models. I was so glad to know Betty.

BYINGTON: Well she, as I remember it, had had some training in dentistry and worked with the dental...

Q: She was a nurse.

BYINGTON: Seems to me that she worked in a dental clinic. Certainly she went off...

Q: She went to a well-baby clinic, because she then took me and I went to that same well-baby clinic.

BYINGTON: Peg Davit went off and became the liaison between the - well they must have called it the Red Crescent - but in any case, whatever the Malayan Red Cross group was and the more or less Diplomatic Corps as a whole. Some one of the wives read books for the blind.

Q: Susie Meade and maybe Cynthia Ely also

BYINGTON: I can't remember what each one did, but each one went off and did something, and after a couple of years of this I think this particular thing started out. There was something called the Presidential Award. In any case, I asked each wife to write up a little piece not more than a page of what they were doing, and the whole thing was submitted. And our embassy won for that year the President's Award for the greatest participation in local activities. And when I went back ten years later it was still hanging on the office wall.

Q: It's interesting. I don't have any recollection of that at all. It maybe had just pre-dated us. We arrived in '59.



BYINGTON: Well, as it was signed by Eisenhower, it had to be pre-Kennedy; and of course we left at the beginning of Kennedy.

Q: You and we left at about the same time in early '61.

BYINGTON: So it must have been... Well, do you remember - this comes back to organized activities - do you remember the women's luncheons?

Q: Yes.

BYINGTON: In all of the previous posts I'd been in, the other women, the non-wives, were not included in wives' group activities. And I had suggested after talking with Elaine - she's Elaine Young now - Elaine Evans what would be useful... And at those luncheons all the women of the embassy met, and everyone was encouraged to please bring a non-American friend. And Elaine felt that this was helpful to the staff. It gave them an easy way to entertain, and most of them did bring friends.

Q: I remember those luncheons with great pleasure.

BYINGTON: I don't think we ever had a speaker or ever tried to organize anything.

Q: No, we didn't that I can remember.

BYINGTON: It was simply a chance to give all the women an opportunity to bring a foreign friend if they wanted to, and an easy place to meet. But returning to what you said about regimentation, I do agree with you and several of the wives that I thought had a lot to offer. Their husbands resigned or retired at earlier levels, because they didn't care for the regimentation. But what brought it on, I don't know.

Q: What made it a perception of regimentation, because in fact, as you say we did do what we wanted to do, at least in KL, and by the time I went from there to very small post and there was no regimentation at all, but it was a twenty-four hour [a] day job. You were always on view.



BYINGTON: I can only hazard a couple of guesses. In the immediate post-war period, when we went back to Italy, we had the military commissary so a great many of the new wives became accustomed to the commissary. The commissary was just like going to the Safeway. When the military pulled out and military facilities were no longer available, somehow the embassies fell into - I think the error - of opening commissaries and canteens. So that instead of going off and exploring the possibilities of the market, one simply went to the embassy basement or the nearest warehouse. So when you went, as I say marketing, you didn't meet anybody but your fellow Americans. It wasn't forced regimentation. It was simplified regimentation.

Then, of course, American schools started and perhaps it does make it easier for the children. I have no way of commenting on that because to do that, you've got to have a twin in an American school and the other in a foreign school. But again that meant that the mothers, instead of meeting foreign mothers, tended to have school life just exactly like school life in the United States. And you had Cub Scouts, and you had the Fourth of July, and you had baseball games. Pre-war we didn't have any of that. I don't remember an organized Fourth of July anywhere I served before the war.

Q: Organized in the sense of a reception? Or organized in the sense of a community picnic?

BYINGTON: Neither, nothing. I can remember one Fourth of July a whole group of us going off as a group to play golf together. That's the only organized Fourth of July I can think of in all the pre WW II years.

Q: So that national days and things like that took on a different kind of importance after the war when there were more countries having them?

BYINGTON: Well of course, as a lower ranking person before the war, I don't remember being invited to anybody else's national day. Perhaps the French tended to have Bastille Day, but I don't... It was only after the war that this rather chauvinistic attitude burst forth amongst perhaps everybody. In Rome it became a large reception at the Embassy. Hordes came through so that it had to be organized into more than one receiving line. So the naval attaché<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> received one group, the ambassador another, and so on. They got no hard liquor because there's nobody that's going to pay for it.

Q: This is after the war?



BYINGTON: This is after the war. Certainly in Belgrade I don't remember any shenanigans about the Fourth of July. In Madrid the Chamber of Commerce organized a picnic. We just were, as far as I personally was concerned, less regimented. At least I didn't feel regimented.

Q: And your social life was more your own than it was an official social life in Naples before the war?

BYINGTON: Oh, there was practically no official social life at all. Well, we and two other vice consuls took a box at the opera, but that wasn't official. Naturally in those days when you went to the opera, you wore black tie.

Q: When you say "two other vice consuls", they weren't American ones?

BYINGTON: Americans? All of us. And the box seated six. The other two were not married so they could each invite a friend.

Q: What fun.

BYINGTON: We only did that one year because then those two left and nobody else wanted to do it. The duBoises were not musical. Oh, of course there were a certain number of official things. Perhaps if a ship came in or a congressional delegation. Vice President Barkley came through while he was still a senator and at the time Wahwee and Doug [Barkley's daughter and son-in-law, Douglas MacArthur, nephew of the General] were posted in Naples. And I think the Consul General did something about him because he was a senator. It couldn't have been very onerous or I would have remembered about it. All I can say is, if there was something official we went to, we probably thought, "What fun. We're going to meet important people or we're going to see important people." [Alben Barkley, (1877-1956), Congressman and later Senator from Kentucky and Vice President under Harry Truman. Barkley had three children David Murrell, Marion Frances, and Laura Louis ]

Q: And you didn't have to entertain officially on your own?

BYINGTON: Not as vice consuls or even consuls, no. Other than the inspectors. [Laughter] Inspectors, if you had any sense, you entertained. And you entertained visiting colleagues if you wanted to. The first dinner party I gave for eight, oh dear, I do remember. The Consul General from Palermo had come up, and of course our own Consul General and the inspector and his wife - and you just try to seat eight people, man and wife who each have a rank. Let me tell you, it cannot be done with any multiple of four if they all have rank. That's perfectly true.



Q: What did you do?

BYINGTON: In despair I went round and round and round the table and gave up, and then I called Margaret duBois and said, "What do I do?" and she said, "It doesn't work." So I moved myself out of the host's place and gave it to the Consul General and then all was right. And I remember, in that connection, there was a naval visit of some sort and in any case I was given the job of the seating. And there were a certain number of guests with a definite rank - oh I suppose the prefect, and I suppose the visiting Italian admiral as well and so on. And there were about - I'm not sure if it was a dinner that some people had to pay to come to. I don't remember how it was financed. In any case there were about forty people that all had a definite rank. And again, as it was a multiple of four, it wouldn't seat, but there were enough small fry at it, admirals' aides, that I could poke them around in corners and they didn't take the rank. But it was something I perhaps lay awake about one night and that was all.

Q: Where did you learn the protocol? Who taught it to you?

BYINGTON: I'm not going to answer that for this thing.

Q: What I hear you saying then, is that protocol in the pre-war days was an extension of a life one had lived outside. It wasn't markedly different from the patterns of social behavior that one had grown up with?

[Silence.]

Q: Was protocol a big deal?

BYINGTON: By that do you mean was it important to us individually, or important to the functioning of the post?

Q: I'd like to hear you comment on both of those.

BYINGTON: Well, as far as I personally was concerned, I don't think I ever gave it a thought. The few things one did were more or less automatic. It simply was not a problem in any way, shape or form.



Q: And it was important to the functioning of the post because that was the way things happened?

BYINGTON: It did make certain things go more smoothly. The fact that a new wife arrived and made her calls, particularly in a large post, you realized that somebody was there. This of course was not true at a small post. In Belgrade we were perhaps four or five wives so you were bound to know this woman who arrived.

But in a large post like post-war Rome, where there were perhaps eighty or ninety wives, there's no way that you would have known of their existence if some protocol arrangement hadn't existed. There we did it a little bit differently. It was like greasing the wheels. If you don't grease the wheels the car's going to squeak. I cannot remember anybody being obsessed by it or - well it's not fair to say I can't remember whether anybody was worried or not because I really don't know - but certainly nobody was obsessed.

[Transcriber's Note: Apparently about 1/2 hour of talk was omitted on the previous tape. Here they attempt to reconstruct what they talked about.]

Q: Let's go back and have you talk briefly again about the non-role of the wife because I believe that that was not on the tape.

BYINGTON: I think the great difference between a non-role - that's a vacuum - and what I said was "the role" of "the wife" - that as a separate, special thing, like being a movie star - I don't think any of us thought of. But we certainly didn't think of ourselves in a "non-role." We were all individualistic people. Some were nutties. Some were highly intelligent. Some were extremely stupid. But we weren't "non."

Q: Yes. You weren't non-persons either, to use the other term that later came up.

BYINGTON: I don't think that naming people by what they did makes any point. You just have to take it for granted that we were very definitely a group of women who were definitely certain of their own existence.

Q: You were persons.

BYINGTON: Definitely. Just as some were unhappy, but they weren't non-existent.



Q: You said - I'm just going to try and encapsulate rather quickly what we may have lost with the non-functioning machine. You talked briefly about the various aspects of what you clearly saw as a job which involved running an efficient household. And to a degree, on occasion, being a helpmate in a capacity for your husband. And a social function which was sometimes there and sometimes not. But certainly you had to mind your behavior somewhat because that is what one did in a place where one was slightly visible. Now that's my summary and it may not be accurate.

BYINGTON: You want me to repeat about the tennis and the carrozza?

Q: Please do because that's a very good story and it makes a point, actually.

BYINGTON: Well I think that I said that the usefulness of a wife came under different headings, one as the wife of a U.S. official. Perhaps we were told - I suppose we must have been told - we were more conspicuous than the average person and therefore had to be more responsible for our public behavior. And as an illustration I spoke of the fact that I played tennis, but I did not play well enough to give my husband a good game. So I frequently played with two of the other vice consuls who all belonged to the tennis club. But I never went to the tennis club in a car with either of the young men. I either drove down myself, or my husband was going down and we went down together, or I went down with another woman.

Incidentally, I didn't mention that, but it's part of the story. The wife of the Crown Prince played in the tennis club and she always came down with a lady-in-waiting who sat on the bench while she was playing. Married women simply did not go out with other men in public places. Now this was no problem in any way shape or form. It was simply a courtesy I paid to the society in which I was living.

The other story was about my sister who was visiting me and who was a charming person and always had all the young men of Naples after her. One day, one of the young Neapolitans called my husband obviously in the greatest state of agitation - and an agitated Neapolitan male is something - and said, "Do you know what your sister's doing?" And my husband said, "No. It's 10 o'clock in the morning. She couldn't be doing anything very drastic." And this man said, "She's riding in a carrozza." (That's a horse and carriage). "On Via Carracciolo." And my husband sort of said, "So what?" And then he remembered. And he had brought my sister down with him in the car with him on the way to work and dropped her off at the American Express to get some money. And she, in her innocence, had taken the carriage and horse back to the house. And that particular drive, a woman alone in a horse and carriage is what the Neapolitan prostitute does.



So my husband leapt into the car, overtook the carrozza, took my sister out and drove her home. Nobody had told her, nobody had told me, and he had forgotten all about it because it was not something that had ever come up. Those are the little things that... If she'd been simply a mere tourist, then someone would have said, "Well there goes a typical American tourist." You did try to be polite in following the social customs of the country you were in.

I might skip a number of years and go to Malaya in this context. I was told, fortunately, that it was offensive to Muslims to have women have their arms and shoulders bare. So when I wore a European-type of evening dress, I always took with me some sort of flimsy shawl as a gesture. It didn't really cover me, but it did show that I understood that they preferred arms and shoulders to be covered. It was easy to do. That would make your husband's role easier in a social sense.

Q: One other thing that we should go back to because I'm reasonably certain that we have lost this time and I'm annoyed at myself for my inefficiency with the machine. Let's talk briefly about rank and then let's go to the Rogers Act because the Rogers Act is really important. You made the point that rank made a big difference and people were quite concerned about it.

BYINGTON: Comparatively so.

Q: Comparatively. All right, that's a good word.

BYINGTON: I think we'll really have to start with the Rogers Act.

Q: All right, let's start with the Rogers Act and then talk about rank.

BYINGTON: The Rogers Act was definitely an attempt to amalgamate the two services of the thought-to-be-more-glamorous diplomatic and thought-to-be-more-mundane consular work. In doing this, they created eight ranks and an unclassified. And everybody took the same examinations. Everybody was appointed into the Foreign Service unclassified and at the same time they were commissioned as third secretaries and vice consuls of... Incidentally, I have all those papers of all my husband's commissions, all signed by the various Presidents and Secretaries of State.



Then you went to unclassified C and you got to B and you got to A and then you went into eight. It was called untenured as it is today, but once you made it to eight - well, it was perhaps more easy to drop someone out when they were in the unclassified. I never read the Rogers Act so I'm not absolutely certain how the terms read, but as a result, all of us - not just husbands, but the wives too - were eagerly watching the post lists and there was definitely a competitiveness in the work world. This did not in any way shape or form affect anyone's friendships. Is that enough of that?

Q: I guess that's enough of that.

BYINGTON: Just to say, once you knew you had your promotion and you knew what your rank was, the other vice consul was a vice consul of B and you were A and somebody didn't seat you right at the table, you didn't give a damn. It didn't affect protocol, it only affected that you knew that you'd gone ahead a little faster.

Q: Do you think the Rogers Act was a good thing?

BYINGTON: I think it was an excellent thing. But as I said before, it never had a chance to go through a whole generation. In about 1934, when it was ten years old, at that time perhaps most of the people in class eight had probably come into the Service under the Rogers Act, but those above class eight [classes 1-7] had all come in under the old two services. In about 1934 or 5, the Foreign Service of the Department of Commerce and the Foreign Service of the Department of Agriculture were amalgamated in. This a lot of people either don't know or forgot. They were amalgamated at the ranks they held. Therefore that put a bulge in the Service from about class three down to class seven.

And when you got to post-war, Commerce and Agriculture went back to their own services. But they did not take back from the Foreign Service the bodies, the persons who had come in pre-war. So that the man who had been commercial attaché in post X in 1936, when in 1946 a separate Commerce Department Foreign Service was reactivated, that man now in the Foreign Service did not get out of the Foreign Service and go back to Commerce.



Then, very rightly, during the war years - I'm not certain of the dates and I'm not certain whether it was a State Department edict or a Congressional one - certainly there was no recruitment for the Foreign Service as such. There was a very correct reason that all the young men at the time had to go to the Armed Forces. Naturally there were some deferments for physical reasons, but I'm certain that the feeling in the Department was that it was unfortunate that someone had to be deferred physically, but it was not fair to those who had gone into the armed forces to give this deferred person a chance to come into the Service given that he was mentally equipped to do so. It was not fair because of a physical defect that he should have a choice over the ones who had not been able to apply.

So there was no recruiting for a period of about - certainly four years, possibly five. I'm not sure whether that began in 1940 or 1941. When the war was over, the Department attempted to recruit into the Foreign Service persons from the military services. And actually, these were again older people - older in the sense that instead of being 22 or 23 they were 27 or 28. They had had the experiences of the war and so again they were not brought in at the lowest level, they were brought in according to their ranks and experiences. This made another bulge.

Q: And then the Wriston Act did the same thing.

BYINGTON: Then the Wriston Act never even gave immediate post-war bulge a chance to be absorbed. The idea was good if they had made it function because as the Foreign Service became larger in the post-war years, there was certainly the problem of the fact that an officer did not have as much chance of serving in the Department as he had had when it was a much smaller Foreign Service. We only served in Washington twice in over 40 years. And therefore the idea of making more Departmental positions available to the Foreign Service - in other words, one service for everything that had to do specifically with foreign affairs - was fine except for the fact that - now I'm telling the hearsay, gossip of what all of us have done - many of those people in the Department didn't want to go abroad and the theoretical slots were not available until those people retired or left. It really didn't ever amalgamate and what's happening now I haven't an idea.

Q: As you watched Wristonees come overseas, did they blend into the post as well as people who had sort of come in from the beginning and worked their way up?

BYINGTON: Well, with the exception of the couple of years we were attached to the military, both of our overseas post-war posts were in very large embassies and in both cases my husband was the DCM, so it's very hard for me to say really how well 300 people mixed because I didn't know the 300 people. By happenstance of my husband's service - he never served anywhere either as first secretary or as counselor - so I didn't really ever have the experience of being a middle level wife.



Q: You were either a very junior wife...

BYINGTON: I was either a very junior wife... I was the most junior wife in Belgrade and then the next post I was the wife of the DCM.

Q: And of most of your husband's work when you were a very junior wife, it was consular as distinct from diplomatic?

BYINGTON: Yes. I really don't count Havana because that was a temporary post and all of the vice consuls there knew they were temporary. But we had five years in Naples by which time there were vice consuls junior to us there, but when we went from there to Belgrade, we were the most junior. And then we were in Washington during the War, and then attached to the military.

Q: If I may sum up and then see because I want to go on with something else. What I think I heard you say was that the Rogers Act and these other acts were better in theory than they actually had time to become in practice because each one was superseded by another one so that problems were compounded rather than ameliorated.

BYINGTON: None of the acts or plans ever was left alone long enough to see if it was going to work. Somebody always tinkered with them. As I've said before, I would think that the first appointees under the Rogers Act must have been men who came into the Service in about '27 or '28. They would have been the ones who were nearly at the top of the Service 30 years later. But in the meanwhile we had three different amalgamations or lateral entries. The Foreign Service always had a point and a bulge and a point. And the bulge of course kept going up as there were more lateral entries. The lateral entries never came in at the bottom.

Q: Was there a degree to which all of these sets of changes affected anybody other than the employee except in the most indirect way? In other words, did the Rogers Act and these other things - how directly did they affect wives?



BYINGTON: Well, obviously they were definitely affected as part of a family unit. Let us say officer X is a class four. And let's say the class four at that time had 400 people in it. And suddenly you take in another 300 laterally into that class. That narrows the number of chances you have to go to class three. Because they will also will take them in laterally as a three. They even took some people in laterally as a one. So the original officer X saw his promotion chances being constantly cut down because with the lateral entries, they didn't bring the slots with them. They were supposed to, but they didn't. The Wristonees - yes, they were amalgamated into the Service, but the jobs that they did in Washington were not necessarily at the same time turned back over to be Foreign Service jobs.

Q: And so that meant that the family stayed overseas or whatever.

BYINGTON: But it also narrowed down the scope of promotion. Since we retired in 1973, of course, the whole thing's been changed again, and I haven't any idea how it works.

Q: Don't ask. [laughs]

BYINGTON: I think the result of all of the changes is that we lost some very able men. People who served with us have gotten out and gone to other things.

Q: I think this is even more true now than it was ten or fifteen years, interestingly and ironically. That's quite a different conversation. We talked last time about the growing perception among wives of regimentation, and you made some comments indirectly about medical and about education: That before the war there were no American schools and there wasn't a medical facility that sort of regimented you. Would you expand on that a little more?

BYINGTON: Well, it's easy to expand because it was non-existent. [laughs] When you went to a post, you went to whatever local doctor [was] at the post. I guess in most places where there was any immigration, they had a Public Health Service doctor who was there for the purpose of examining the immigrants to see that they were physically safe to admit into the United States. And most of those doctors were only too glad to advise, but they couldn't take care of you. They had no license to practice in the countries they were in. And I'm not sure how they were chosen. They certainly were chosen for the purpose of examining immigrants. They weren't chosen to be surgeons or something of that sort.

So everywhere that I served until the last years in Naples, we always had the local doctors. That's the doctors. True, we probably tended to have the same doctors. I suppose most of the foreigners, not just the Americans, tended to have the same doctors, either the Germans or the Swiss.



The same thing was true of the schools in post-war Rome. Some of the younger wives with small children organized an American school, which as far as I know is still thriving. But it was a private enterprise. It may now have some government help, I don't know. But children were educated at home or in small groups. I'm talking about very small children. There was the famous Calvert System. There were at various places some international schools. They were apt to be Swiss or French. The English have always all over the world for generations sent their children by eight years old back to the UK, so that you did not find English schools.

Q: And your son was born in 1934 in Italy. Now you were back in this country when he really started school.

BYINGTON: I had the Calvert System for him as a small child in Belgrade and then he had school over here in the war years. Then he was eleven when we went back to Italy. And again I had the Calvert System and we had tutors for French and Latin. And then he went to boarding school when he was thirteen I guess. Yes.

Q: When he had Calvert as a little boy, was he by himself and you taught him, or were there several of you and...

BYINGTON: No I taught him. I offhand don't think there was another child... Well, there were no children at AFHQ and then in Rome, the one year that he lived with us there, there was no child exactly his age. There were younger children and those mothers got together, as I said before, and started the little American school. But those children were anywhere from three to ten perhaps.

Q: Did you ever consider Italian schools?

BYINGTON: No. Most Italian private schools at that time were what we would in this country call parochial schools - church schools. And my husband actually had been tutored by monks. His sister had gone to a Swiss school in Naples. But we didn't feel that that was particularly the answer for our son. And as I said, he had a Latin tutor and a French tutor. And the rest of what he needed was not difficult to teach him. He lost out on a year of science, but that was not important.

Q: But then you sent him off at thirteen. How did you feel at the time to send a relatively young boy that far away? Was that difficult for you to do?



BYINGTON: Well, naturally any mother, particularly as while I'd been at AHFQ, I had been really more with him than I might otherwise have been. But it was a decision that had been made a long, long time before - that he would at the appropriate time go to Andover. So that even had we been living in the States, he might not have gone until he was fourteen. We might have waited one year more. But he would have gone to boarding school in any case. So I can't remember ever agonizing over it.

Q: What I'd like to do now - I've been saving the best for last, and it's a long last. The best, as far as I'm concerned is, I would like to listen to you talk about the historical changes that you saw starting in Italy and then in Belgrade leading up to the war, both as you viewed them and, if you could give me some anecdotal material, too, about your own. You told me not to start on history, but I really like that [laughing], so I'd like to start on history. You arrived in Italy as Mussolini was consolidating power if I remember my...

BYINGTON: No, he was fully in power by the time we got there, '34. Well, I'm trying to think back to what I felt then as compared to afterthoughts now. I can't think that I had been brought up with any great horror about dictators. One always says at least he made the trains run on time. He did a number of very beneficial social things in Italy. He had drained the Pontine Marshes and the terrible malaria they had in that area was wiped out because once they got rid of the mosquitoes... He'd settled a number of war veterans on these small farms.

Certainly at the time we arrived in Italy, there was no active opposition to Mussolini within Italy. There were exile groups in Paris. We had a great many Italian friends, partly because of my husband's own childhood there. We did not know Italian officials. One, we were junior, and two, basically our government policy did not encourage this. While it was not encouraging opposition, neither was it blessing the dictator.

We all knew, as I think I said earlier, that our phones were tapped. And we certainly wouldn't have rushed out in the streets waving flags, "Down with the Dictator," or any activity of that sort. We were aware that people were jailed and one young man we knew didn't show up for his black shirt drill and was put in jail and his older brother said, "Serves him right for being lazy." He was released after a few days.

At the time of the Ethiopian War, there's no doubt about it that the population was definitely with Mussolini. We had a radio and he made a marvelous speech. The sanctions that were then applied didn't work in any way, shape or form. We may have had a little less gasoline, but it didn't impoverish the country and it didn't bring it down or anything like that. And it had the affect of driving Mussolini more into the arms of Hitler.



I might just deviate a moment to Hitler because this is an absolutely true story that's almost incredible. We had a German "schwester" - a trained baby nurse - who had left Germany and her parents because she was strongly anti-Hitler, and she had served with an English family for several years in England, and then she came to us and was with us - well, about five years. She had been to the United States with us and through all of this was stoutly anti-Hitler and never took her holidays back in Germany. Her mother came out to see her in Italy.

Oh, incidentally, she had been told by the German Consul that she must report whatever went on in our house. And she came right away and told my husband about this and he told her not to worry, nothing important went on worth reporting. When Hitler came to Naples, she was ordered to be down at our railroad station at X hour in the morning to cheer Hitler along the way. And then she was to go to another point and so on, and I was very disturbed that she was going to be all day. And I gave her a camp stool and a thermos and sandwiches and so on.

She finally came back at 11 o'clock at night ecstatic, wild-eyed. She'd shaken hands with Hitler and she was converted. This is an absolutely true story. She went to Belgrade with us and when it was obvious that the war was going to break out, I told her she'd have to leave us because there was no way that I could arrange that she could be evacuated if we were, and I insisted that she had to return to Germany which she did. I was in touch with her after the war and she realized her dreadful mistake. The point I'm trying to make is the mesmerism of Hitler.

He also, in his own way, was very impressed with the Italian Navy which as it steamed around the Bay of Naples was indeed an impressive sight. And of course Germany had no Navy. So I think in many ways, Hitler felt that Italy would be a stronger ally than they turned out.

The Spanish Civil War was the first realization by my generation of the horrors of war. The first thing that happened was that the Spanish Consul was forced to resign as he did not support the Franco forces, not because he was a socialist, but he said he had taken his oath to support the government, and support the government he would. So he lost his job and could not go back to Spain. And of course was persona non grata as far as the Italian government was concerned. And I don't know what happened to him in the end. All of the consular corps in Naples chipped in and put together some money for them and some clothing and they were literally thrown out.

The Spanish war was not popular. In fact it was so unpopular that the hospital ships had to come in at night and the wounded would be unloaded when they could not be seen by the general population. Then we left and went to Belgrade in 1939.

Q: Had it become apparent in Italy at that time that there was going to be war?



BYINGTON: To the man in the street, probably not. Certainly all the Italians hoped that they would not be involved in it. At the time of Czechoslovakia, the Munich Pact, the whole attitude of every Italian, whether he was fascist or non-fascist, was just a great sigh of relief. For other Europeans, the Consular Corps, it was obvious that this was simply a postponement.

And by the time we got to Belgrade, again it was not an unsimilar situation. Prince Paul was the regent for the young king. He, by his personal taste, was certainly pro-Ally, but he was a realist. The dictator was again very definitely a dictator. He was probably pro-German. But the country did remain neutral until it was invaded by the Germans. When war broke out in the fall of '39, of course, the diplomatic corps split in two: the Germans and the Italians on one side with the French and English on the other side. We were not yet at war. And the Italians shortly thereafter invaded Greece. I've forgotten the exact sequence of events.

But then we came along to the fall of France and that split the French Embassy in two. It was a very interesting period to watch the developments, but what Yugoslavia did or didn't do was very peripheral to the main events of the War. And it would have made no difference had they come in or not come in.

Q: Starting in '37 or '38 in Italy, how much did this slowly escalating set of tensions affect your daily lives?

BYINGTON: Well, again as I say, as we had not ever been encouraged nor did we really have the rank, but even the Consul General, he and his wife were fluent in Italian, did not see any of the high officials on anything except absolute business. In terms of personal lives, it had very little affect. Our Italian friends kept right on being our friends.

Q: And they were primarily business people?

BYINGTON: Yes. Or land owners. Well, they were young, I mean...

Q: Yes.. I mean the junior members of those families.

BYINGTON: Several very large landowners and their children. Well, there were several of them... Well this is only incidentally funny. [laughs] The older sister of one of the families was married to a man who became aide to the viceroy in Ethiopia, so they went down to stay in Addis Ababa. And she borrowed a trunk from us because she didn't have any trunks. They were very poor. She borrowed a trunk because she was a friend, not because her husband was the aide to the viceroy, and it made no difference to me what her husband did.



In due course, the trunk got back to me and stamped all over it were "Aide to the Viceroy, Ethiopia." And when I got the trunk back after the war and traveled with it to New York, there was some consternation in the Customs when this trunk all labeled "Aide to the Viceroy, Ethiopia"... [laughter]. I had just not thought to try to get the labels off. But that simply brings up my point. It had no effect whatsoever on our personal relationships. We didn't stop seeing people because of the fact that her husband was going to be aide to the viceroy.

Q: Did you have large numbers of friends within the Diplomatic Corps, and was it a fairly large group of people in Naples, or was it a small corps and...

BYINGTON: It was, as far as I can remember, a rather small corps of - off-hand I don't remember that there were any South Americans at that time. I may be wrong. There may have been an Argentinean, for instance. There were Scandinavians, Swiss, English and French, German. If there had been an Austrian, he disappeared at the Anschluss [Germany's takeover of Austria].

Other countries had then (and this doesn't really particularly have to do with wives) a practice that in many ways I think it's a shame we don't do. They had a great many honorary consuls of people who - well, the Norwegian was a Norwegian shipping agent and he acted as an honorary consul for Norway as did his son in post-war years. And many businessmen combined the function of being consul with whatever their business was. I happen to think it's a good idea.

Just recently in Spain we've closed Seville and we closed Malaga some years ago. That means that if someone loses their passport and gets in an automobile accident or anything of that sort, he has to apply to Madrid for any help. Now these honorary consuls normally will issue visas. They don't - it depends on the country, but they don't normally passports. But they give you the documents permitting you to travel to somewhere where they do issue passports. And if you lost your passport and had to go to Madrid to get a new one and you had to stop in a hotel overnight, it's extremely difficult without a document.

I needed to have a notary act for a document in the U.S. Had to send to Madrid and have it sent back. Madrid would do it for me because they knew who I was, but most people would have had to have gone with it to Madrid. Therefore this function of the honorary consul in a great many cases is very useful. The British do it to an enormous extent so that they have an official within reach of almost anybody.

Q: Was the Consular Corps within Naples a highly social corps - including the honorary consuls?



BYINGTON: Well not highly social. The men used to lunch together, I forget whether it was once a month or once a week. That is the officers, when I say the men. As far as I know, there were not any female officers, but had there been, it was an officers' luncheon. And they frequently invited an outside distinguished guest to join them. If it was some kind of businessman who happened to be vacationing there, or obviously if somebody's fleet came in, the admirals onboard. And from time to time we had a social dinner. But it was not a pressure thing. You went or not as you liked. We were much more, I think, free-wheeling in those days.

Q: Then when you got to Belgrade and you were both the most junior, and it was getting clearer and clearer that there was going to be war, what was living there like?

BYINGTON: Well, it was extremely interesting and... Well, I'll go back to when we talked about what a woman's role was. We happened to have a very good short-wave radio at that time, and we were living outside of the city on the hillside and we had a tall antenna. So we got the best reception of anybody at the time of the outbreak of the war and then again at the time of the invasion of France. I had worked out when all of the different countries broadcast their news and in what languages. So I could get the Russians in English and French and Italian, and the BBC in English, French and Italian, and the Italians and so on. And whenever there were moments of great crisis, I stayed all day at that radio and telephoned down to the office.

Mind you we didn't have the telephone communications that we have now. We didn't have the same cable communications. So my news was always the first news that the office had of what was happening in some place. We had also, because of the Yugoslavs' neutral position, had all of the important newspaper people traveling back and forth on their way to Bucharest, on their way to Budapest, on their way to Athens. So we heard a great deal of what was going on even though we were seemingly isolated.

As I said, the diplomatic corps was split, but America was neutral. It just happened that the Italians were our particularly good friends. The diplomatic corps was also very mixed in the nationality of the husbands and wives. The wife of the German - I've forgotten what his rank was - but in any case, he was the Nazi Party head. He wasn't the ambassador, but he was the head of the Party under an assumed rank, and she was an American, so it was very difficult for her. The Belgian Ambassador's wife was Italian. There was a great deal of strain in that sense, the mixed marriages. The English Minister then was a bachelor. The French had the most difficult time insofar as the fall of France. They split right down the Embassy, some remaining with the one government and some remaining with the other. The wives weren't ordered out. Our government sent a ship to Ireland and a ship to Genoa and said these were the last ships that would be sent and urged...

Q: This was what, 1940?



BYINGTON: 1940 in June. And urged the wives and children to leave. Our Minister, who was Arthur [Bliss] Lane, absolutely insisted that the children go. But he left it up to the wives to do as they wished. So I and one other mother left and I took with me the children of the wives who didn't leave because I had the youngest child, though I didn't want to go. Obviously I was the one who had to go. I couldn't give the youngest child to someone else. It was '40; he was six.

But many of my friends were leaving the northern part of Europe at the same time. And it was a very interesting trip back from my point of view because we had known Dorothy Thompson. She had married with Sinclair Lewis, and in his book *Dodsworth* he tells of his life with her. And they lived, he and she, in the *Dodsworth* book in the house we lived in in Naples, and it's described in that book.

Q: And he actually lived in it after you left?

BYINGTON: No, years before. At the time he was writing *Dodsworth*, he lived in our house and Dorothy Thompson lived in the little house next to it. It's so perfectly described. They also filmed the film in the garden at the property. That sequence in *Dodsworth*. I don't know if *Dodsworth* is still in print or not.

Q: I've never seen it, so I don't know.

BYINGTON: Sinclair Lewis died in Florence after the war and he and Dorothy Thompson were divorced by then. But they had a child. She was already, if not divorced from him, separated at the time. She was the correspondent for the *New York Tribune*. She was on the ship and our ambassador [inaudible]. But they very kindly asked me to join them in the evening, and they were both in communication with the U.S.

The captain would not allow any news bulletins to be published because there were so many refugees on board from mixed countries that he was afraid that if any news, bad news, got out, it would cause a great deal of disturbance on shipboard. So instead of having the daily news which you did on most ships, we had none.

Q: And so by sitting with them, you were able to find out...

BYINGTON: Yes.



Q: How long a trip was it? A week?

BYINGTON: Perhaps a little bit longer because all ships at that time were held in Gibraltar for inspection. And then we traveled, of course, with lights and a red cross on the side. We didn't have any troubles. I mean, in other words, submarines didn't follow us.

Q: Were you afraid that they would?

BYINGTON: Well they had stopped the ship before us, about ten days before we sailed, and made everybody get into the lifeboats, but they didn't do anything. Well, obviously these refugees were very nervous. They were Czechs, they were Poles, they were German Jews. And they were very unhappy, miserable human people, not being at all sure what was going to happen to them when they got here. Some of them had no means...

The ship was crowded. They had beds in the swimming pool. It wasn't exactly a luxury crossing. But, on the other hand, we had perfectly adequate meals, served, not standing in line, and they had a good bar, and you could get any drinks you could afford to buy. The cabins were of course crowded. We were five in a three-bed cabin with a cot. It wasn't horrible in any way.

Q: How old were the children that you bought home with you?

BYINGTON: I had a little girl thirteen and a little boy twelve and another very nice, very responsible boy of fifteen. And they couldn't have obeyed better anyway, they... I took a deck chair [laughs] and I said, "Now you have to report to me every hour because I can't run all over this ship looking for where you've gone, nor do I expect you to sit on the deck all day. But you must come back every hour on the hour and tell me where you're going to be next." And they came without fail always.

Q: Did they help keep track of your six-year old?

BYINGTON: No, he was much too young for them to have any... He was six years younger than the youngest. They weren't interested in him. They went off and played shuffleboard or deck tennis or whatever there was. There was no swimming pool. They weren't mean to him or anything like that, but it simply was not - there was too much age gap. And they hadn't known him in Belgrade. His friends had been younger children.



Q: One of the things that we're asking everybody that we talk with is the effect that you think that growing up in this manner had on your children or your child in this case, both in its positive and in its negative.

BYINGTON: Of course I've known a great many Foreign Service children. Obviously, it has its effect. Anything you do anywhere has its effect. I think that our generation of Foreign Service children probably... The saddest effect, and I use that word deliberately, is that they didn't make life-long friends. Now I'm not sure given the mobility of the U.S. population today that any children ever live very long anyplace, but certainly of the Foreign Service children including my son that I've known, very few of them have friends that go back to the years that they were anywhere - well, prior to college, let's say.

Q: On the other hand I get the feeling talking with you that you and your husband considered your son a part of a group of people who were at least adult life-long friends, even though you didn't necessarily all serve in the same place. I get that feeling listening to you talk about...

BYINGTON: Well that is because, at that time, my husband's contemporaries were a much more homogenous group. We were individuals within it, but in general, everybody that we knew, every man had been to college...

Q: More or less to the same colleges? They had even known each other in college?

BYINGTON: Many of them had gone to the same colleges, though in terms of my husband, nobody from his class at Yale as far as I know came into the Foreign Service. Some before and some after, but not actually of his class. But some of the wives I've known here in Washington... We tended to... Lots of people from California.

Q: Did your long-term friends tend to be the people who had served in Europe, or did you have friends who had also been a part of the Asian or the Middle-Eastern - I don't want to use the word Mafia, but you know what I mean, within the Foreign Service?

BYINGTON: Well, obviously you tended to know... We never served twice with the same people at a post, let's put it that way. People we were with we never saw anywhere else, the people we were with at Naples - well, with one exception - Outerbridge Horsey was in Naples and in Rome very briefly. On the whole, it was more a question of... We met up in Washington or we joined each other for holidays somewhere.

Q: Or you contacted by mail.



BYINGTON: Or we visited each other at our various posts. We went several times to stay in Paris with friends. We saw friends when we went to London, people came to stay with us, not in Belgrade [laughs], but in Rome and Madrid. And there was another thing about those days that was particular, I noticed the last trip my husband and I took. We used to, as we went around the world anywhere, partly by courtesy and... You stopped by the Embassy and let them know you were in the country. And it usually turned out that you knew somebody there, and usually that somebody said, "Come to lunch," or the ambassador said, "Come to a reception," or... You tended to keep in touch.

This last trip we took, we had to get a visa. We didn't realize a diplomatic passport had to have a visa to Uruguay or someplace, and so we went up to the Embassy in Lima. We were retired. And it couldn't have been more helpful in terms of getting us the visa. But we went through about three iron gates, armed people, and we finally were taken to a glass-enclosed aquarium all around the outside where people could see in, and the officer came down and was very apologetic that he couldn't take us to his office, but they could see no visitors whatsoever except in this glass aquarium. That's all we saw of the Embassy in Lima.

Q: And nobody invited you to anything?

BYINGTON: I don't even think you're allowed to see the list of who was assigned there. So if our best friend had been there, we wouldn't have known.

Q: Unless you had known in advance.

BYINGTON: If you stopped by the Embassy and you asked to see somebody, well, comparable to what you might be, and they usually recognized your name and they had the book anyway, they could look you up, and then you said, "Who's assigned here?" and you found that somebody you'd been with ten years ago...

Q: And you called them and they said, "Do come over for dinner, for a drink" or whatever. When you went back to Europe after the war, what sorts of changes did you... I mean obviously you came into the Embassy at a different...



BYINGTON: Well, I have to put a rather wide parenthesis there. When we left the U.S. on the ship, and that was a trip, we were assigned to the Embassy in Rome. Alexander Kirk was the Chief of Mission. He wasn't called ambassador because the peace treaty had not been signed, so he was High Commissioner, I think it was. And midstream, which we didn't know, our assignment was changed, and when we got to Naples, my husband was told he'd been assigned to AFHQ - Armed Forces Headquarters South. That was at Caserta outside of Naples. Well, at that point complete chaos reigned because no women were allowed to be assigned to the Armed Forces. Italian friends of ours put us up.

Q: By no women, you mean the wives couldn't go?

BYINGTON: That's right. And the hotels were requisitioned and so on and so forth. So in any case, we went to stay with Italian friends while this thing was sorted out. And my husband was assigned a hut up in the gardens, but no women, no wives. And I could stay either with the WACS or the nurses. And we had a child, an 11-year old. Well, the Ambassador - High Commissioner - had requisitioned billeting in Naples, and when he became aware of the predicament, he turned it over to us. That is a long story of marvelous reminiscences, which don't have to do with here. But the long and the short of it was - I just have to put in one.

After we'd been there a couple of weeks and I'd gotten my old Italian cook back, and that again is another wonderful story, and my old bread man came down. The guards would not let him in and he told the guards he'd served my mother-in-law and me and that I liked a certain kind of fresh bread from the country. And I liked fresh eggs and he was bringing them because he heard I was back, so that was fine.

Then we gave the commanding American general and the commanding English general a dinner. And it was a very good dinner. And they both complimented me on it and asked how did I manage to prepare this dinner on rations. And I said I didn't have any rations whereupon consternation blew up all over the place. No rations whatsoever with a child there, etc., etc. And I said I didn't need rations. Oh, but you cannot eat on the economy. And I said, "But you see I can eat on the economy." "No, you can't eat on the economy." And I said, "Well if I don't have rations, what I am going to eat on?" "The town mayor will fix that up tomorrow." And indeed the town mayor hove to and fixed it up.

The smallest unit they could figure out was, every five days I could go down and get what twenty-five men could eat. So if I got Chicken Day, I got chickens for twenty-five men. If I got Spam Day, I got Spam for twenty-five men. As I had no mess sergeant - by then we'd gotten a jeep - I drove the jeep and I found it advisable to take my son with me and drove out to what they call the "dump," then filled out umpteen million forms and drove around the piles, loaded up the jeep and came back with the food. And I was there for about - over a year before wives began turning up.



Q: With all of these piles of food. You didn't go every five days did you?

BYINGTON: Yes because I wanted the flour and the rice and the soap.

Q: What did you do with all of this extra food?

BYINGTON: Well, for a long time the fishermen were delighted to have the Spam and bring me fresh fish, and they fished right under the rocks at the villa. And the soap I could change for broccoli and so on. [laughs]

Q: [laughs] So you had your own sort of slow exchange.

BYINGTON: Yes. I never put things on the black market in the sense of cigarettes and things of that sort which then they would have taken away and sold. It was simply a question of bartering what I had too much of for what they didn't have. And soap was something that is very precious and what was I going to do with soap for twenty-five men every five days?

Q: No, that you didn't need. So you were there for two years? That was a two-year tour?

BYINGTON: Well, AFHQ as such began to fade out. The Italian Peace Treaty was signed in '47.

Q: You went back in '45?

BYINGTON: And stayed at the Headquarters until the fall of '46 and by then it was pretty much fading out. My husband had to go frequently to Rome. Originally he went to Rome once a week and there was more work at Caserta. But then the American forces moved to Leghorn, the British forces moved to Verona. And when it became apparent that he was spending more time in the North than he was in Caserta, we moved up to Rome, and then when that faded out entirely and the Embassy opened, we were already in Rome.

Q: And he was the Deputy Chief of Mission.

BYINGTON: Yes.



Q: Would you spell Caserta?

BYINGTON: Caserta. But that's a whole book in itself. We had no icebox, no hot water. I never saw a [inaudible] in the house. [laughs] I had my own personal Air Corps guards, Italian, not the U.S. Government's. And those are all wonderful stories, but they're not typically Foreign Service stories.

Q: If you were going to tell a pre-war typically Foreign Service story, and then I'm going to ask you to tell a post-war Foreign Service story. Having said that this period wasn't typical, I'll grant you, but I'm not sure there is such a thing.

BYINGTON: Well, pre-war, and this sounds dull, I can think of lots of pleasant evenings that we spent with colleagues playing bridge. Life was peaceful. No this AFHQ period was uniquely different from any kind of life at all that anybody lived.

Q: Would the quiet evenings playing bridge apply to Belgrade in the period leading up to your evacuation?

BYINGTON: Oh yes. The Belgian Ambassador and his wife loved to play bridge. And frequently came to play. There was no opera in Belgrade. A German company came down and we went, and in Naples, as I said earlier, we went frequently to the opera, every year. Well...

Q: You've made your point, which is what I was trying to get at which is what was sort of typical. After the war, when you moved up to Rome, this was a change in status in that your husband, from being at the bottom of a consulate or legation, had gone to almost the top of an embassy which carried with it a different sort of role for him. Did this affect you and what you did and your... How much would you say of your life in Rome was determined by that, and how much of it was the fact that Rome was...

BYINGTON: Well a whole lot obviously. Well, as I said earlier, I happen to have been blessed in Service years with four marvelous "chiefesses" [principal officers' wives]. In my entire service, I only served under one dull woman. And, thank goodness, briefly. But Mary Dunn was a wonderful person to serve with and when she got there, she asked me to come over and have a talk with her. And she explained exactly what she wanted and what she expected me to do. And left it to me to arrange how I was going to do it - never interfered. And was always available when I went to her and said, "Mary, I think you're going to have to do this."



Q: What was it she wanted? Could you spell that out a little bit?

BYINGTON: Oh. Essentially she told me what she wanted and so on. By then we were, well, certainly more than 150 officers and it was quite impossible for Mary to talk about protocol, to receive all those women who came to call. And we worked out a pattern agreeable to her and to myself that I would report directly to Mary. I asked all the wives of the heads of sections in the Embassy to report to me. I couldn't receive the 180 wives either. And I asked each of the section chiefs' wives to please know personally the wives of each officer serving under their husbands. And then if there were any problems they could come to me, and if I couldn't solve the problem, I would take it to Mary.

Q: By problems, you mean...

BYINGTON: Well, I'm now going to give the illustration of the only one I took to Mary. We had one older wife whose husband's rank was not very far up, but they had been in the Service a number of years. And she had never been at a post where she had not personally been received by the head of the post. And she was bitterly resentful of the fact that she didn't see Mrs. Dunn personally. So I asked her husband's - her section wife to bring her to tea with me, but that wasn't enough. And I then went to Mary and told her exactly the story, and I said, "There's this one wife to whom it makes a great deal of personal difference to see her alone and not just at a large reception. Do you mind? I cannot help with it." And Mary said, "Of course, I understand the problem entirely. Bring her to tea next Thursday," or whenever it was we went to tea with Mary. And that solved that. The woman had personally been received.

Q: She was out of a different school and she was...

BYINGTON: Much older than I. As I say, her husband had not gone up the ladder as fast as some others. And she - [laughs] rank and all the rest of it - she just felt she had to be personally seen by the ambassadress.

Q: And that's that.

BYINGTON: But most of the time, if the section chief's wife couldn't handle it, usually if they came out and we talked it all over, it straightened itself out without having to...

Q: If the section chief's wife couldn't handle it, what sort of thing was it?



BYINGTON: Oh, spats between wives and who was going to be what at the school or who was going to run the Red Cross bazaar or...

Q: That sort of thing. Did the section chiefs' wives assume that this was their role - I mean that they had this kind of sub-leadership responsibility?

BYINGTON: Well some did better than others and obviously the ones that did it better had less reason to bring the problems to me. You can't turn everybody into the same mold.

Q: [laughs] No, you surely can't. But it was assumed at that point that there was sort of a parallel informal wives' structure that paralleled the husbands' formal structure?

BYINGTON: Well I think most people did it... Well, in many cases they genuinely liked the other wives. This doesn't mean to say that they didn't mix. It was only somebody had to have somewhere they could go if they had a problem.

Q: Oh sure. If you know that somebody's got a very sick child and they need community support...

BYINGTON: Yes.

Q: This sort of thing as well.

BYINGTON: Yes. But with that many people, one person can't do it all plus the other things unless it's someone who's running an office and sits in the embassies. I think they now have nurses or somebody to do that sort of thing.

Q: Well yes, they can do it at certain levels. They can't necessarily do it at the - how shall I put it - "good neighbor" sort of support system. But yes, there's some of that.

BYINGTON: I mean I'm perfectly frank and honest about it. I'm sure that there were wives at the Embassy that I didn't see more than a few times a year and only at large receptions.

Q: And maybe weren't sure who they were.



BYINGTON: Well, we were pretty good about that, all of us trying to know who the other person was by name. But I wasn't sure that they had these children or that child.

Q: You were in Naples as the Consul General's wife in 1972.

BYINGTON: '72? Yes.

Q: Do you remember the 1972 directive on the role of wives and whether, when it was issued, it had any effect where you were at all?

BYINGTON: I don't think I ever saw it. If I did, I paid no attention to it. But we were a very small group there and we didn't have any organizational structure whatsoever in Naples. How many of us were there? Possibly eight officers? Ten? If you counted all the [inaudible] I guess. I had each when they arrived to tea with me and chatted and talked. But there was no wives' luncheon, there was no men's luncheon. By then they had a canteen in the basement of the office and most of them seemed to lunch there.

We had a women's meeting for a Christmas party which we organized and gave. But that was basically volunteer and there were one or two wives who didn't want to participate in it. And nobody forced them to. We raised a kitty. We asked everybody in the office to contribute some money and then some went out and bought the presents, and some wrapped them and some made the cookies.

Q: This was a children's party?

BYINGTON: Yes. It was for the Italian children. I think we let the American children come, but I don't think they got presents. I've forgotten now.

Q: I remember when we arrived in Kuala Lumpur and I had been all primed because I had taken the wives' course. And I had a lovely blue linen dress that I had bought specifically to come call on you. [laughter]

BYINGTON: And what happened? It was awful?

Q: No, nothing. It was nicer than coming and calling in the formal sense. We got a message within 24 hours after we'd gotten there, would Dan and I come together and have drinks in the evening? And that would be my call. And it was a very nice thing to do. I remember that.



BYINGTON: We usually did that there, but I didn't do that in Naples because in KL we did have that luncheon group so that I had the time and saw the wives independently, whereas in Naples, as we had no organizational group, and as Homer and I by circumstance saw a great deal more of Italian officials - well, we both spoke Italian and so on - I didn't have as much - I didn't do as much with whatever the wives were doing. And there was a rather large gap in ages again, too, but by '72... Shall we go down and have a drink?

Q: That'd be lovely.

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Continuation of interview: March 22, 1989

Q: Let's see, this is the continuation of the interview with Mrs. Homer Byington and it is the 22nd of March and we are now sitting in my living room. And you were just commenting about...

BYINGTON: Well I've been thinking the last two weeks of our previous conversation. And your questions about what Foreign Service life abroad was like during my years. And the more I've thought about this, and the more I've thought about the articles I read in the State Department Bulletin and the list of courses that are offered, I began to think that there's something - I'm not the first of course to say this - that something is wrong with American education. The wives seem to have endless counseling or they seem to be told how they can bring up their children, what doctors are available, all about what housing will be like. And all in all, not only before they leave Washington, but there seems to be all sort of supporting activities arranged at every post.

I read the questions in, I believe it's called "Ask Dr. Dustin," and they say, "What do we do about our child's earache?" Well, in my day, if your child had an earache, you found a doctor and took your child to a doctor. And I wonder whether the present-day wife is incapable of doing this by herself or whether she's so bewildered by all the things she's being told that she's lost track of how to do it by herself. Surely they don't need all that amount of counseling.

Q: It's an interesting point, because I've made some of my living - the independent money that I've earned - in parts of this kind of counseling. And the counseling has developed because people felt like they didn't have enough information to make judgments. And they wanted to know a little bit more about what, say, the doctors were like in Naples. Or what the source of medicine available to them as a family was like in Lusaka. And how to... They seemed to want more information so that they could then make up their own minds.



BYINGTON: Supposing they decided that they didn't like the post. Then what does the wife say, "I'm not going to go"?

Q: Some of them are saying that.

BYINGTON: So then it's a question of whether they want to be with their husbands or don't want to be.

Q: In some cases, or whether the couple stays with the Foreign Service.

BYINGTON: Well, that of course, is always the alternative. Well, [laughs], let's go back a long way. How about our ancestors who went across the prairie in the covered wagon? They didn't stop to ask whether there were doctors at the gold mines when they got there.

Q: No. I'm not disagreeing with you. I think there are people who are saying, "Since information can be made available, we would like to have it." I think that some talk about the kinds of things that are common to people who move from one place to another, the kinds of adjustments that they make, the kinds of aspects of culture that they can learn, I think this helps people do it with more grace.

BYINGTON: Well, I don't know whether today there still exists what was known as the post report.

Q: It does. It's limited in its...

BYINGTON: Ours was a fairly detailed. And it was written, at least in my time, the wives were asked to contribute to it in terms of things that they would know about that the man wouldn't. What sort of foods were generally available, probably what the prices of the foods were. That particularly occurs to me. Maybe we wrote something about what clothing was available. I don't remember the details. I do remember about the food. And those reports usually carried a review of what medical facilities were available. I think perhaps, and again I'm not sure, a little more thought was given to where people were transferred. Usually families with small children were not sent to the so-called "unhealthy posts."

Q: It was a smaller system and there were fewer posts also.



BYINGTON: Well, Africa comes to my mind because of two people that I knew were there. And both men were sent ostensibly as bachelors. It turned out that one had a wife and hadn't told the Department about it. But that was not the Department's fault. [laughs] But normally in some of those more primitive posts, the junior officers with young wives and therefore the possibility of young families were not sent. I wasn't familiar with the Far East, and as I say, Africa was nearby. [laughs] There was one thing...

Q: Did you do a lot of informal sharing of information? In other words, if you heard that somebody was coming to Naples, did you write them a letter or did they write you a letter which you then answered? How did that work?

BYINGTON: Well that divides into two parts. If you were transferred to X and you knew somebody who'd been in X, you asked them anything they could possibly tell you. And frequently you would have a colleague at your post that had been there. Secondly, if you were transferred, you usually wrote what was basically a courtesy letter to the wife of the head of the post. Not always by any means, but frequently. And that was answered telling you anything that might not have occurred to the post report...

Q: Or that needed to be updated because the post...

BYINGTON: Yes. It wasn't always answered by the wife herself. She may have put a covering note and said, "I've asked so-and-so to send you this new information." But there wasn't any rule about it. And of course as you went on up in the Service you almost always knew somebody at the post you were going to. As there got to be more people and you as a person had already met more people... It was done more informally.

Q: I suspect some of the training now is in response to the fact that the system is so much larger that it is more difficult to make it work informally. That people who go from, say Singapore to Bujumbura may not know anybody in Bujumbura and there may not be anybody in Singapore who does know somebody, so that the informal networking maybe doesn't work quite as accurately as it did in a smaller Service where people knew each other more. Or is that - a view on my part?



BYINGTON: I wouldn't really have a knowledge of today's Service to be able to answer. I was thinking more of the lists of courses that seem to be being given within the Foreign Service Institute. Which for me personally would not work at all. I would not be able to go and listen to being told exactly how to do this, that and the other thing. We had rather intensive language instruction in Malay because that was not a usually spoken language. And I suppose they give courses in French and Spanish and all the rest of them. And if one has the time in Washington before going overseas to learn a few words of... I think that's a great help, if only because you can....

I was so proud of myself when we landed in KL and got off the plane and I had a beautiful phrase which I... All I remember was something like "Gowan gluff gluff," [laughs] but in any case I said, "The clouds are dark today." And I pulled out my phrase with great pleasure and the Chief of Protocol spoke impeccable English [laughter] so my "gowan gowan gluff gluff" was not very useful.

But I do think it's appreciated in any country if you can speak something in their language. The language yes, I agree with. But I can't help but feel that some of those other courses are redundant, that many... We talked about this before. We were talking about changes in the Foreign Service. I'm not sure that there are any greater changes in the Foreign Service per se than there are in the actual life in the U.S. So I think it would be an error to overstress that the Service itself has changed. I think it has simply changed to the degree that life in general has changed.

Q: I'm glad you've made that point because one of the things when we begin to pull this thing together as a book, one of the points which I think we can make is that the Foreign Service serves in a great many ways as a very good microcosm for looking at some of the rather drastic changes that have taken place in the society at large over fifty years. Particularly in relation to women and women's work. Probably the single most complicated issue that faces the contemporary Foreign Service is the question of employment for women who are wives of Foreign Service officers, who in the normal course of life in this country, and not moving around, would be employed in their own capacity... And this particular issue has caused as much long-term difficulty and reshaped the Foreign Service as much as anything else I think.

BYINGTON: Well that of course is a much-disputed topic today. I think it was just Sunday's Post had a long article on the "Mommy Track."

Q: Yes. It's a very complicated issue.

BYINGTON: And until it's solved internally, it'll be very difficult to solve it externally.



Q: You mean within the family?

BYINGTON: No, I mean until it's been solved within the United States, it can't be solved in our foreign posts. I suppose the working mother earns enough to pay the attendants of the Day Care and I suppose the attendants at the Day Care earn enough to pay a less expensive Day Care where they leave their children. But at some point, you come to the end of the line. Somebody's going to have to stay home.

Q: I think it's very complicated. I think that this leads to a question that you have raised sort of tangentially, occasionally, and I wanted you to come back to, if you don't mind, and this has to do with education and demographics within the Foreign Service. You talked earlier of a fairly homogeneous group of people in the pre-war Foreign Service. Same general kinds of education. General social background that was fairly common to the group.

BYINGTON: I'm not entirely in accord. It seems to me we had more eccentrics and, until we got up to the McCarthy period, nobody particularly thought of this being eccentric, you know. All of them had to have a good education. But I can think of one man who...Well, first he graduated from Cambridge. Then he went to MIT. Then he went from MIT, and that is more business training, he went on and got a doctor of philosophy. So he was roughly five years older than the average in his entering class. He was slightly eccentric. I can think of, oh any number who... But they all had a basic good education or they couldn't have passed the exams.

Q: Well I think that eccentricity is one thing and I guess what I'm meaning by what I think I'm seeing in terms of... They tended to come from upper middle class or what some people might use the term "East Coast Establishment" families. This didn't exclude eccentrics, but it was a kind of common background that meant they started with some common understandings of how one did things, how society worked, that sort of thing.

BYINGTON: That's partially right, though not entirely. Just incidentally, by law at that time, no one could come into the Foreign Service who had not been an American citizen for, I've forgotten how many years. But in other words, it was almost impossible for a naturalized citizen to have come into the Service. Whatever the number of years was was such that someone... Because you can't become naturalized until you're 21, at least that's what it used to be. It might be 18 now.



And so, if the waiting period was ten years, twenty years, whatever it was, someone who became naturalized at the age of 21 wouldn't have been able to come into the Service until they were over 30 and they were unlikely to do that. Now that law, which was a law and not just a local rule, was abolished and the result is that there have been a great many more persons in the Service in recent years of non-American, in terms of living in the territory of the United States, background.

Q: And I would say probably a broader geographical base across the United States too. And, while education not necessarily as much from the same East Coast schools. Partly again as a factor of numbers and partly as some deliberate cultural diversity.

BYINGTON: Well, again I think that's reflected by U.S. foreign interests. Our interests from 1900 until World War II were largely directed toward Europe and China/Japan. India, after all, was part of the British Empire that was coped with through London. Africa - we had perhaps some commercial interests, but certainly no political interests prior to World War II. We had some interests in Middle East oil.

There were large parts of the globe that the United States wasn't interested in per se and didn't have any reason to be interested in at that time. Therefore, you tended to have people from the West Coast who knew about China and Japan or people from the East Coast who knew about Europe on the other side. But throughout the middle of the United States, they probably were not as interested in foreign affairs. Therefore, it didn't occur to them that they would want to have a career outside of the country.

Q: Did you see as many changes out of the Wriston Program in terms not only of husbands but of wives as you think happened out of the 1924 changes in the Foreign Service?

BYINGTON: Well after all I didn't really come into the Service until '32, so it was already supposedly an amalgamated Service or had been for eight years. So what it was like before '24 I really... [laughs]

Q: You only know what you've heard.

BYINGTON: I mean I didn't live it myself. I would say a large number of the wives that I knew in the Service had come in before the, what was it called, '24 Act. From a Wristonee point of view - well there were so many in terms of... I haven't the numbers in my mind, but I would think that it probably at least doubled the Foreign Service.



Q: More than that I think if I've seen the numbers right.

BYINGTON: Whereas the '24 Act amalgamated two bodies that were already people serving abroad. That the amalgamation didn't always go smoothly was another matter. But nobody was overwhelmed.

Q: Could you talk about the reasons it didn't go smoothly?

BYINGTON: There were utterly different types of examinations for the two services. I never saw the exams but they were different because the day-to-day... Well, let me go back to something we did have then, and I would love to run the State Department. We used to have local vice consuls who were people, American citizens, but who lived in the places where they were appointed. In other words, they didn't take exams and we used to call them non-career vices. They were always going to be vice consuls. Very rarely were they ever transferred, primarily because they didn't want to be.

They were either people who had married locally or for various reasons wanted to stay where they were. And they did do a great deal of the mundane part of the consulate work, which, it is allowed, is mundane. And therefore even the junior career officer began to issue visas or... He usually had the assistance of the local [non-career vice consul] when he went out to protect Americans. But I think the career junior officer was in a more important position in his work than they are today when we no longer have these... And since I've left the Service, I don't know what's become of the Staff Corps, which was sort of created to cover that non-career vice.

Q: Oh it's very much there. And then there is a local staff as well...

BYINGTON: Oh I'm not talking about the local staff, because in terms of the consulate, the local staff cannot issue visas and passports. No, I was talking about the administrative side of the office. Who goes out and hires the charwomen and so on. It used to be to a great extent handled by the so-called non-career vices. Which now frequently falls into the lap of a career officer and he thinks to himself that, "This is not what I joined the Foreign Service for."

Q: [laughs] That's probably true.

BYINGTON: And then returning to the amalgamation of '24, those people who had been in the Diplomatic Service never had any of that more mundane aspect of their service, and I have to say in all honesty [laughs] although my dear father-in-law wouldn't like it, that they probably were better educated than many of the old-time consuls. So that there was bound to be...



They'd come in to do different types of jobs. Their backgrounds had been the reason why they selected going into either one service or the other. And it was only when they took everybody in on the same examinations did it become feasible to really assign people to either service. But somebody who had spent fifteen or twenty years in the Diplomatic Service and had become first secretary in Rome wasn't really going to want to be sent to be consul in Frankfurt, say, even though Frankfurt's a nice town.

Q: In a post when you had people who had come - in the '30's - when you had people who had come in, some of them from the Diplomatic Corps and some from the Consular Corps - was there tension among them?

BYINGTON: Well, not tension. No, it was simply a question of feeling that... Well, all right, start off this way. The capitals of any country are usually the more glamorous cities of any country, and therefore those people who were not assigned the capitals wondered why all the ABCs got posts in the capitals and the XYZs didn't. And when it was attempted to mix them up a little bit, as I say, the man who'd spent fifteen or twenty years and was a first secretary in Rome was going to find the work in Frankfurt boring.

Q: Because it just wasn't his work.

BYINGTON: It wasn't what he'd done for all this time. I think that it was more a question of which were the nicer posts. My father-in-law served in Hull and Liverpool and Leeds and Bristol as consul at various times in his career. He never served in London. Now Leeds I'll risk cannot be compared with living in London whether you're an automobile salesman or a beautiful pianist.

Q: [laughs] Exactly. I wonder if we could talk a little bit about post-war Rome and then talk about Kuala Lumpur briefly. And then you asked me to ask you to tell the story of the smuggled dog.

BYINGTON: Well let me tell the smuggled dog now, because he fits into post-war Rom[laughs] The whole Foreign Service is human and there must have been times in Foreign Service life when every one of us broke some law. But we had... [Interruption as tape ends and continues on second side.]



Let me just quickly go back about... There are so many fascinating Foreign Service things. Frugal was born in Naples just before we were transferred to Belgrade. And I also had her father and mother. So when we went to Belgrade we went with three dogs. And at the time that I had to leave Belgrade, Frugal was the smallest one, still only a year old, and was the one my young son loved dearly. So we took Frugal back with us to the U.S. and that was in '40. Well that was no problem. But in '45 when we were sent back to Italy, we went on a ship called the "Gripsholm" that was chartered from the Swedish and filled with the Red Cross that evacuated people from the Far East.

Q: My father-in-law was evacuated on that...

BYINGTON: Rickety old firetrap it was, but in any case... Of course all of the reservations and everything like that were arranged through the Department, and my husband went into New York to pick up the tickets. And the New York end of it was being handled by what had been the Export line before the war. Because of the Export line in Naples, he knew a lot of the people.

So he said he wanted to pay the extra fare for the dog which naturally the Department wouldn't pay for. And my husband was going to pay the extra fare. And the man whom he knew behind the counter said, "You have no dog." And he looked very firmly at my husband. And he said, "I know nothing about your having a dog. I repeat, I know nothing about your having a dog." So my husband got the idea, came back and told us his story, and we then began practicing every night with Frugal at cocktail hour. She was put in a hatbox and put down in the middle of the room and everybody talked all around her, and she had to stay quiet in the hatbox.

So it worked. We got down to the dock and took Frugal and put her in the hatbox, and the hatbox went away with the luggage. And because it was just the end of the war, all the luggage was inspected as if it were the Customs before you went onboard. And there was Frugal in the hatbox. Well the Customs Inspector knew my husband well and so he enticed him into a long conversation, and this went on and on and on. The bags didn't get looked at. But I thought, "How is Frugal going to stand this?" And finally he said the bags would go on board. And I said, "Oh this is my mother's precious china," and grasped it with my arms and went on.



And because we were three, we had a cabin to ourselves. Other people were broken up and the wives had to go in a cabin with other women and the men with other men. And we had a tiny weenie little shower. And we popped the dog and my son into my shower. And endless people came onboard to see us off, and we had drinks coming in and out of the cabin. And we kept the door locked and opened it when the steward brought the iced drinks. And finally we sailed. [laughs] And my husband rang for the steward the steward said, "Si. We knew something funny was going on in the cabin because you always had the door locked." So then I took the dog up and walked around on the upper deck and the next morning we sat in our deck chairs and the deck chairs were lined three deep. And the dog sat underneath the chair and people came around and said to me, "Well how did you get the dog on board?" We just said, "What dog?" The captain came round and greeted us and smiled and he never mentioned the dog. [laughs] And that was the story of smuggling the dog!

Q: What kind of dog was this?

BYINGTON: Scottie.

Q: Scottie. You had Scotties in Kuala Lumpur didn't you?

BYINGTON: Yes. But not descendants of Frugal. [laughs] Well, then we served with the military for two years, that was another mix-up. And also thousands of amusing stories. And then went up to Rome in '47.

Q: Could you give me some reminiscences of Rome?

BYINGTON: Well it was an extremely interesting time because they were having the first post-war elections. And I did say to you to look up that article in Fortune didn't I?

Q: Yes. I haven't done so yet, but I have it written down to do that.

BYINGTON: Because that really covered the whole set-up in the Embassy in great detail and was very well done. And it mentions the names - it was meant to be a correct story, not a fictional one. At the suggestion of the Embassy - it worked - everybody, every in-law American in the United States, was urged to write all their various relatives back in Italy and tell them not to vote communist. They didn't care whether they voted socialist or liberal or... But just don't vote communist.



And I can remember one of the Italian workmen who we had around who was so vividly disappointed because he had not gotten a letter from his relatives in the U.S. And it was a matter of pride to people to have gotten these letters. So I quickly wrote off to somebody I knew in the States and said write Mr. So-and-So a letter.

But it was a marvelous piece of coordinated effort and well worth it. Already the Marshall Plan was in effect and grain was sent to Italy, and whenever the grain ships arrived, the Ambassador went and greeted them, and this was an opportunity to point out that this was grain coming in from the U.S. The U.S. is not communist. Posters were put up. Well, as I say, it paid off. The communists did not get a majority of... They've always had a very large vote in Italy. I think less so now than almost at any time. But that was probably the most interesting moment.

Q: Did you, just out of interest, did you spend a good deal of time paying attention to what was going on in the election, or was it something you just sort of knew about? You as a person.

BYINGTON: Well, that gets back to me. That's the sort of thing that happens to interest me, so I would pay attention to it even if I hadn't been in the Embassy.

Q: So would I. It's meat and drink for me.

BYINGTON: But obviously, per se, no American official went out and campaigned or made a speech. All the things that were done were done, such as my writing to someone to say, "Please write this man." And we had Neapolitans working for us, and we told them they all had to go back to Naples to vote. And they didn't seem to see the seriousness of that. My husband absolutely insisted. And they all went off together in the jeep and went down to Naples and did vote. It was an effort to get people to go out and vote. They'd never voted before, it hadn't meant anything to them.

Q: What was the year of the election?

BYINGTON: It must have been the end of '47 or early '48. I've forgotten exactly. It wasn't dead in the middle of the winter.

Q: I can look it up.

BYINGTON: Yes. The Allied Peace Treaty with Italy was signed early in '47 and the elections, these were their first post-war elections... They had a republican form of government already, but it had not been elected.



Q: And by this time you had a son who was back in the United States in school. Were you doing volunteer work in...

BYINGTON: Well that was my point on one of these papers. I had offered through some of the American priests...Well they had the Boys Town project, was very active there, run by the - I'm going to say the American Jesuits and that may be utterly wrong, but in any case it was a Roman Catholic project. And I offered to teach English there, basic English to the students. But I have found in the Catholic and Muslim countries that they really don't want - they're glad to have the money, but they don't want persons who are not of their religious faith having much influence with their children.

Q: I can sympathize with that.

BYINGTON: And I hadn't felt any great desire to do anything with elderly people, so I don't know whether they would have accepted that or not, but I'm inclined to think that... This was done more by the church organization.

Q: Was Rome in the post-war period a very social city?

BYINGTON: Well yes. You start off with the fact that Rome has two diplomatic corps. They don't necessarily mingle, but there's nothing to stop them if they wanted. But you have got two diplomatic corps because of the Vatican. And then there's an old Roman aristocracy. A few of them were influential people. Most of them were just charming and attractive. But there was only a layer of them at any social function. As I say, a few of them were influential. Some of the large landowners started improving their agricultural methods or started improving their animal stocks. But no, they didn't... See, they were charming, pleasant...

Q: Was it an out-everyday-for-lunch, every-evening-for-something sort of place, or was it...?

BYINGTON: Well again, we were at the top level so it tended to be out a good deal for us. I was talking the other day with a younger wife who had been there in Rome with us, and she named all sorts of people in the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Corps who I only recognized as names. So I think that pretty well through the whole embassy, everybody was busy. There were just different groups of people.

Q: I'm sure that's true, yes.



BYINGTON: I don't think that it was a place where just the top was busy and the bottom was bored. It would be very hard to be bored in Rome.

Q: I would think so. You'd have to be the kind of person who's bored every place.

BYINGTON: Yes. We had a charming woman there who did fascinating lecture tours and did them in great detail to small groups, and I belonged to that as did several other wives. And you could go on - music, art, archaeology, everything. But it was a relatively tranquil life. We lived down on the Via Appia Antica, and I've been told since that it's absolutely impossible to live out there now because of the traffic. It takes so long to get into town that people no longer live out there. But at the time we lived out there, there were quite a few other diplomats within a stone's throw of us and a number of people in the Foreign Office. We rented the house from an Italian diplomat who was away at the time. And it took about twenty, twenty-five minutes in. Beautiful drive.

Q: Did you have to find the house yourself?

BYINGTON: Oh yes. I've forgotten who gave us the lead or the tip, but... No we had no housing agency as such that found houses. After that period - now I've forgotten the background of where the funds came from, but they were called "counterpart funds." In any case, the U.S. government ended up with a whole lot of lire for one reason or another [laughs] and, as a result, they bought what is now the residence - I think they already owned the Embassy itself - I'm not sure about that, but I know they bought the residence, and they bought a very nice apartment building for senior officers.

And they either bought or constructed at least two more apartment buildings - one for junior officers, and one for single persons. So that there's less need if any. I don't really know whether anyone takes their own house in Rome now or not. It may be that they have to live in the government quarters.

Q: Was living in Rome difficult at that point, as Rome was coming back from wartime devastation, or was it...

BYINGTON: I can't think of anything that... Well the telephones worked better in Rome then than they do in Spain today. [laughter] And, of course, we did have coupons for gasoline. I think the price of gasoline would have been prohibitive - certainly living out in the country - if we hadn't.



Q: This was rationing coupons or diplomatic coupons that gave you duty-free gas?

BYINGTON: Gave us duty-free gas. Tax-free gas. And whether there was a limit on how much you had, I forget. I don't remember ever having any shortage or ever thinking about it. We had two cars. And of course the Embassy imported the liquor and the cigarettes as they always do. I can't think of anything that there was a shortage of. Beautiful materials, beautiful clothes. Quantities of food, good food. And of course Rome was never damaged during the war, so that you didn't have the terrible slum areas that were left in Naples, which is where we had lived from '45 to '47 when we were with the Army. It was an extremely interesting, but nothing hair-raising or dramatic.

Q: One just gets involved in the day-to-day events of a particular city and a particular place and just keeps being involved in them. Is that a correct sort of...

BYINGTON: Well, I think that everywhere immediately after the war except for the terribly damaged war areas - I'm not talking about [inaudible], I've heard... We didn't have the terrorism of today. Italy has the Red Brigade. People are always being kidnapped. That sort of disruptive aspect of life didn't exist. And once the election was over and a firm government was in place...

Well they had riots about things. [laughs] I remember one day - I can't remember why I happened to be down at the Grand Hotel, but I was at noontime - and rioting groups came up the street from the railroad station. I don't even remember what they were protesting about. But it was the first time I had dealt with the fact that the police sprayed them with hoses. They didn't use guns or rubber bullets or... But the hoses all had paint in them, so when the rioters dispersed off around the space, it was rather easy to pick them out because they were sprayed with paint. [laughter] So the police didn't have to charge in and break up the riot, the ward broke them up; and then in small groups, it was possible to arrest them and take them away.

Q: And you sat there with a...

BYINGTON: Well I was just sitting in the hotel and was told, "Don't go out."

Q: You'd get paint on you!

BYINGTON: I'd get paint, that was what was going to happen, I'd get paint. [laughs] I don't know whether some of these rioters that we see on television today - Palestine and Lebanon - whether they could be subdued with the hoses of paint or not.



Q: Were there particular people that you met who have made a lasting impression on you? Are there Americans or Italians from this period?

BYINGTON: Well if you mean people whom I think are outstanding...

Q: Um-hum.

BYINGTON: Certainly the [inaudible] were remarkable men. Shelba was the Minister of the Interior then and was thoroughly delightful. But those were people who were not my intimate friends. I saw them socially, my husband saw them on a working level. But they weren't contemporaries. We had many Italian Foreign Office friends. As they were contemporaries, they didn't necessarily impress me. I realize that they were brilliant or able, but...

Q: It's only in retrospect sometimes that one sees what... I think of the number of people we knew in Kuala Lumpur who have since gone on to... We all knew each other as very young people and we had a good time together, but they've since gone on to be quite senior in the Malay government. It's sort of in retrospect - oh yes, we knew them and it's kind of hard to take them with quite the same sense of awe in consequence.

BYINGTON: It is. I don't know today, thinking around the world, off-hand, I don't know anybody who is active in any government anywhere. In other words, my contemporaries are gone.

Q: Just Tunku [Former Prime Minister of Malaysia]. And he's not active.

BYINGTON: Oh he hasn't been in years. The last time we were in KL was in about '74, ten or fifteen years ago. And already he'd retired to Penang. Razak was then Prime Minister and of course he's died.

Q: From Rome you went back to the United States and then to Madrid. Would you like to talk about that spell a little bit, or is it sort of, except a different place, a continuation of the same?



BYINGTON: Well, it's relatively a continuation with the difference of... We the American government had a much closer relationship with the Italian government than we had with the then Spanish government. At the time we were in Madrid was the time our government signed the first base treaty and my husband did work on that. And we were giving the Spaniards a good deal of military aid - in the training sense rather than any other - as a quid pro quo for the bases. But we were not... I'm trying to think how the government looked at it rather than how I looked at it.

Q: I'd like to hear how you looked at it to a degree.

BYINGTON: Well, amongst other things... I think I'll start with the government first. [laughs] We have had in this country for the last - well maybe one hundred years - a very large Italian population. There's always been a strong connection between Italy and the U.S. And I don't think we ever had at any time that same sort of connection with Spain. Partially, of course, because of our interference in Cuba and the Philippines and our assistance to South America to liberate themselves from Spain. It didn't leave the same close feeling nor was there a large Spanish immigration into this country.

And then of course we move onto the fact that it was Franco and the Civil War. And certainly our government disapproved of the Civil War, but our volunteers almost all fought on the anti-Franco side. And then we move up a little bit. Italy did try by her own efforts to make the armistice and come in on the other side. Whereas, although Franco was very helpful about escaping POWs they were considered definitely to be on the non-Allied side during the war.

Well [laughs], going back to Nathaniel Hawthorne and all sorts of Americans who lived in Rome in the '80's and 90's. There were all sorts of cultural ties that we have with Italy. Except for "Tales from the Alhambra," we don't have the same or weren't taught in school the same ideas of Spanish culture that we have of Roman-Italian culture. And all the people who had taken Latin and studied Caesar's Gallic Wars. [laughter] I think probably even today more American school children would be likely to have heard of Italy one way or another than they would have Spain. Barring the Guatemalan immigrants.

So that in some ways made the work harder and in other ways made it less interesting. There were long hours at the Embassy, but it wasn't the... You didn't have the same feeling that you were accomplishing something. At the time of the fiasco Suez certainly the Embassy was able to play a helpful role.

Q: You were in Spain at that time.



BYINGTON: At that time. And it just so happened - nobody planned it that way [laughs] - that we were up in Galicia with the Ambassador on a tour. And of course Franco always summered in Galicia and so the Foreign Minister came right up and foreign affairs were conducted in Galicia. And we were able to put over the American point of view that this attempted seizing the Suez and marching into Egypt was not a good idea. But off-hand, that's the only sort of crisis that I can remember.

Q: Did you find it more difficult to know Spanish people? I know you spoke Spanish.

BYINGTON: I don't think - I would probably have to say yes in the sense that the Spanish people we knew were the "ones that one knew" in Madrid, in quotes, whereas in Italy we had a great many friends that had nothing to do with the government.

Q: And that was from the long family history with Italy?

BYINGTON: Well, also...Well, yes, certainly, partially due to that. But in Spain - the people in Barcelona wouldn't like to hear this - Madrid was the center of activities, and although the big financial institutions were often up in Barcelona and the industrial magnates were in Bilbao, or the industries, the coal mines, steel mills... And although we made many visits to both Bilbao and Barcelona, they were always official visits.

Whereas in Italy, we frequently went to places unofficially and just did meet the people there, or we knew somebody who had a friend and said, "Oh, look up our friend." And the friend had nothing to do with government in any way. And that was not true in Spain. We knew the people who lived in Madrid. They weren't all in the government by any means. But they were all very definitely upper class Spaniards. A few education people. But it was just definitely by their own structure a more limited - had a more limited structure. There was not in Spain any very large influential middle class. Off-hand, for instance, I don't remember having ever known in Spain the owner of any large store such as, say Woodward and Lothrop, whereas I did know people who did that sort of business in Italy. I don't even know the names of who owned the large stores. But otherwise, the general pattern of life was pretty much the same.

[...]



BYINGTON: We knew of our appointment [to Malaya] - oh, perhaps it was in June. Well, I could tell before two absolutely delightful stories that took place in Madrid. H.S. Lee and I've forgotten exactly who else now had gone to London to sign the last papers of the transfer of power. And on their way back to Malaya - why I can't imagine - they decided to stop over in Spain. Our opposite number in the British Embassy, knowing nothing about the fact that we had been assigned to Malaya, called us and asked, "Could you help me out? I suddenly have the Malay delegation on my hands and there's no use asking any Spaniards because they haven't any interest in Spain, and the Spanish Foreign Office isn't interested in Malaya. And I've got to put together a luncheon for these people. Would you come?"

Well, we chuckled and thought to ourselves, "This couldn't be more fun. Here we're meeting the Prime Minister and he doesn't know and we do." So we trotted off happily to lunch and had a delightful time. And about - oh it couldn't have been more than a week later - the British Ambassador called up and said, "Homer, I hate to impose upon you again, but I've got the Sultan of Kedah coming to stay and what am I going to do with the Sultan of Kedah in Madrid?" (Well the Sultan of Kedah then was the uncle of the future Prime Minister), and he [the British Ambassador] said, "Would you mind coming to lunch?" So we said, "This really is getting to be great fun!" [laughs]

So that day we did go a bit early and Homer took the Ambassador aside and said, "I'm not committed to any of this, but I think I should in all honesty tell you that we are going to go to Malaya. And so we're delighted to be meeting these Malays." Well, coming back to Merdeka [independence], it had been decided at the time of making the arrangements for the transfer that the British High Commissioner would be the number one of the Diplomatic Corps forever instead of changing as it does in most countries. And that the number two would always be the Indonesian - that's because of the Malay ties with Indonesia - and that the number three would be the Australian.

Q: For the same sorts of reasons.

BYINGTON: For the same sorts of reasons. So our government felt that there was little point in our being in Malaya before Merdeka, simply vying with who was going to be number five, whether it was us or the Canadians or the Germans or what have you. And so they thought it would be more appropriate to simply wait for four or five weeks before immediately recognizing the government. So we didn't go until... So we came back here to Washington, and Dr. Ismael - we always called him Doc - he was later Foreign Minister.

Q: Yes? Ismael was his only name?



BYINGTON: Only name. He was later at the UN and was going to be assigned as ambassador in Washington. So we met him here in Washington. Had a very nice time with him. But then when we were about - well actually had sailed and gotten as far as Hong Kong, when the Malay government telephoned and said that they were about to have the visit of some personage of importance, I can't remember now who, and that they would prefer Homer postponing his arrival until after that visit because there wouldn't be time for him to make his presentation calls beforehand. They probably thought that it was not quite fitting that we should be there during this function in a position where they couldn't invite us to the function. So we delayed in Hong Kong about a week which was thoroughly delightful. Didn't bother us at all.

Q: What was your feeling about leaving Europe? I mean you had up until then always been posted in Europe.

BYINGTON: Well, in my first interview, my first interest in this oral history project was reading Hilda Lewis's story. Harry Lewis had been one of my early beaus and had gone off to Singapore, so lurking in my thoughts of the Foreign Service had always been the glamour of the Far East [laughs], so I thought this was great fun.

Q: Would you say in retrospect that the Far East is glamorous?

BYINGTON: It certainly was for me. From Nepal to Borneo.

Q: And you managed to see a good bit?

BYINGTON: We managed to see a great deal. We went over to Borneo and...

I'd like to backtrack a long way. You said did I find the East glamorous. I'm inclined to think you find glamour where you're looking for it. And it went back again to the Service in the last years. Probably the young officer of today cannot travel to a great many places that we could go to because of all of the changing conditions. We certainly, in any country we were in, tried to see everpossible inch of it that we possibly could. That takes me back to the Wali of Swat. Swat is a little territory - well, in Pakistan, but rather like Sikkim and his ruler would be in relation to India. And the Wali of Swat was a very good friend of the Pakistani High Commissioner in KL where we lived.

Q: Shir Ali Khan.



BYINGTON: Yes. They'd both been in Sandhurst together. So he said, "While you're in Pakistan, you've got to go stay with my friend the Wali." So it was all arranged. And on our way back from Peshawar - and incidentally we were not allowed to go into Afghanistan in those days, so we drove as far as the Khyber Pass and down the other side and to the border gate and looked into Afghanistan - and on the way back we deviated off the main highway to go to Swat. We were greeted by tribesman border guards and escorted into a rather fortress-like guest house. When I say "rather," there were slits way up in the high cement walls with a light. But it was thoroughly comfortable. The partitions of the walls were slightly flimsy. And in the due course the court chamberlain came down to see us and extended the invitation to dinner. And we were convinced he came down to look us over and be sure whether we were safe as dinner guests or not. I don't know that he'd ever heard of Americans before. But in the room next to us we heard animated Italian chatter. And we thought of all places to find Italians, up here in Swat. And in the due course the court car came for us. Oh, before that, we had taken a drink, thinking that these were Muslims and there wouldn't be anything to drink when we got to the dinner party.

We arrived. And here were an entire group of men - I was the only woman. There were several army officers, generals, and all the Italians, and it was a famous archaeologist who was excavating in the area. We had a thoroughly hilarious evening. The liquor flowed most freely, almost too much freely. [laughs] And that was our visit with the Wali of Swat. The next thing, we were sent off in a car to tour the insides of the mountain fortresses. And it was - well it was the Himalayas. It was much more rugged than the Vale of Kashmir, but it was not unlike being up in the mountains on the edge of Kashmir. It was not nearly as fertile as Nepal, where Mt. Everest is.

This [trip to Nepal] was not the same as the year of the Swat trip. It was a year earlier. We had decided we'd go up to Nepal. Admittedly, even in those days, the FS staff took care and feeding of diplomats, and so we sent our passports over into India and they arranged the flight tickets and so forth. So off we went. And then we got to [Delhi]. Well, the airport escapes me now, but it's the place where we had to change planes to go up to Nepal. And the Indian official wouldn't let us on the plane because he said we had no visa to Nepal. The Embassy had just overlooked getting it. So my husband argued with him and pointed out that he, the Indian, had no right to stop us from leaving India. That we were not being held in India for any crime, and the official agreed to that, that we did have the right to leave India.

So my husband said, "What happens to us in Nepal is none of your business." And the Indian admitted to that. So then we said, "All right, we'll go to Nepal." And the Indian said, "But I'm going to get into all sorts of trouble." [laughter] So my husband promised that when he got to Nepal he would get a visa and when we got back a week later, he would show the visa to this Indian. And off we went to Nepal.



And we were met by an Embassy official and the car. And my husband said, "We have to have a visa." The man from the Embassy had a fit about this. He got us in and got us to the hotel. And he said, "We're having a terrible problem." The new ambassador had only arrived several days ago and they couldn't get him presented because the court soothsayer who cast the beans for what days were good days couldn't find a good day. And so everything was being held up in a great trouble. [laughter].

So we went on to the hotel and were shown to our room. The hotel was an old royal palace. It was a famous hotel. And the bar in it was run by a White Russian named Boris. And everybody in that part of the world knew about Boris and his bar in Nepal. We had a huge bedroom and a huge bathroom with a marble tub and hot water and all was fine. And we went down to dinner. And fortunately we are very fond of Indian food, so we enjoyed the dinner except that the waiter was filthy dirty and had bright pink enameled fingernails. That was a little off-putting. And went to bed.

And during the night the rats had a polo game on the ceiling. And the ceiling was a canvas tent, and as the rats ran back and forth like mad over this, the tent swayed and went up and back. We thought the rats were coming through at any moment. And it was quite impossible, the whole thing. So we said the next day we wanted to have a room with a cement ceiling, no more canvas silk ceilings. The man at the desk said that the only thing like that is the servant's quarters. We said we didn't care, it had to have a cement ceiling.

So we wandered out onto the roof up some little iron stairs into a room where it did have a cement ceiling. And it was filled with flies. Incredible number of flies. So I got out my spray can and sprayed. The flies really piled up ankle-deep on the floor and the little boy who was carrying our bag was horror-stuck and said, "Oh, but you may have killed my grandmother!" "Well did you ever think that if your grandmother's been condemned to be a fly, you should be very glad that she's been killed so that she can now move on into another life. She may now be a bird." "Oh," he said, "I never thought of that. Thank you. She's probably a bird."

So we went outside to leave and we met two other Americans living on that same piece of the roof. And they said, "Oh, we see you've learned too about the rats." And they were stationed there with the AID mission. [laughter] And had moved up for the same reason!

Q: Did you do a lot of traveling in Malaysia?

BYINGTON: Oh, a lot.

Q: Did you run into similar sorts of...



BYINGTON: Well [laughs], remember it was fairly primitive then! Yes, we went out to the east coast one time with [inaudible] who was minister of...?

Q: Possibly. I...

BYINGTON: Well he came from the east coast and he was quite young and had a very young wife and nice little children. And his wife had solid gold teeth. And he wanted to go electioneering on the east coast. He was a protig<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>gi<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> of Razak, and he invited us to go with him. And we both thought this would be great fun, seeing how they campaigned for election and visiting the coastal villages. You know there were no roads in those days over on that side at all. And he had a small - oh like a small yacht. It was a government, oh, buoy tender or something like that. [...] Little Ismael.

Q: Right.

BYINGTON: And I think I probably said that he had this small yacht-type.

Q: Yes.

BYINGTON: And at that time there were no roads throughout the east coast at all. And I think we got on board in Rompin, I can't remember. But you probably realized that the Malays have a terrible fear of the water. And so we went along on this little boat and we were always looking out for sea serpents. We did see a big sea snake. But in any case, we got to a small village, typical village, about sundown. The sun of course all year around went down about seven.

And they had a huge political rally and everybody spoke. And all that was fine. We couldn't understand a bit of what was going on. There was noise and music and lots of pollution. We had naturally assumed we were going to go back and sleep on this little boat which had perfectly good if slightly cramped accommodations. Not at all. We were led off to the phengulu's [head man's] hut. And the phengulu had cleared out his bedroom. He and his wives all put mats down on the floor of the other room. The house was on stilts over the river. And underneath it on the river bank the goats grazed.



We were ushered into the bedroom, which was a very important thing to have. It was the only house that had a bedroom. And the bed was boards and it had draped over the top of it some purple hangings because the phengulu was connected with one of the sultan's families. And that was it. Well, I always travel with my pillow wherever I go, so I had a pillow. But poor Homer had nothing. So I took the pillowcase off the pillow and stuffed the pillowcase with every bit of underwear and clothing that we had and got a pillow for him. And we lay down on the board.

Well, the plumbing facilities consisted simply of a hole in the floor that went down to the river. And I was a little afraid of even drinking the water that we had. I think we may have had a bottle of soda water or something with us. In any case, it was impossible to sleep. Absolutely impossible. The goats wiggling around down underneath us, the hard boards. And I was afraid to spray the thatch for the mosquitoes because I was afraid we'd drop all kinds of other bugs out of the hatch.

So at I guess 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, with the first rays of daylight, we both got up and peeked out. And there was no way out except to go through the room where the man was sleeping with his wives. And we were desperate. We had to get out of that hut. [laughs] So we tiptoed very quietly out and headed down to the water, the ocean, the Pacific Ocean. And went out and had a swim. We at least felt a little cleaner, slightly, vaguely refreshed and eye-opened. And we then wandered ourselves back to the little yacht.

Well when our host discovered that we'd fled, there was consternation. We had of course insulted the phengulu. We'd also insulted Ismael by not liking what he directed for us. [laughs] And it was simply the most horrible, embarrassing and unhappy morning.

But we sailed away and we went to Tiamon, the island. And at this point, tired and sleepy, I was at my worst. And I said, "I am absolutely not going to go and sleep ashore under any circumstances. I don't care who is insulted in any way, shape or form. I am not moving." And as soon as we possibly could get off, "I'm terribly sorry about all this, but we're going back to KL." Well, Ismael was frightfully upset and he said, "Well will you at least come to the rally and the meal?" And I said, "Yes, of course." And we went to that and that was fine. Sat on the floor and had an excellent rice meal.

Well he busied himself with where we were going to sleep. He absolutely would not let us sleep on the boat for fear of the water. And he finally came back and said, "Well I've arranged it. You can sleep in the hospital." Well, the hospital consisted of... At least it was a stone building. Again no sanitary facilities in the building. [laughs] But it had a proper bed. And the bed did have cups around the feet for the bugs. Then we went back to KL.

So about a year later he asked if we'd come again and told me with great pride and glee that this time he'd gotten a really big boat and we could sleep on it and we did sleep on it. You asked if we went around Malaya. We went all sorts of places all the time.



Q: And as a consequence, got to meet people in a way that you didn't in Spain?

BYINGTON: No, I wouldn't agree with that. I think we met the same level of people in Spain as we did in Malaya. In other words the officials, the villagers and the townspeople. But the people we met out in the villages, exactly like the same people in Spain, were not likely to come look us up in Madrid. They were different in their customs and perhaps their education. But it was still officialdom functioning. And at the time we were in Malaya, it was very difficult to go off just by ourselves. We went up several times, drove ourselves up to the Cameron Highlands. But we always had - we knew they were there, they told us - we always had police watching us. And they asked Homer never to go away from the hotel except to the golf course without telling them where he was going. This was...

Q: Emergency.

BYINGTON: Yes, but it was not so long after the Thai silk man...

Q: Oh, Jim Thompson.

BYINGTON: ...had disappeared. This always was a great mystery.

Q: Still is. Well there were a lot of other ramifications to that. His sister was murdered.

BYINGTON: Also, again in Malaya there was the problem of the language. I would say 90 percent of the men in the government then, even in the regional governments for lack of a better word, spoke English, but very few of their wives did. And many of the sultans that we made the official calls on - their wives did not speak English. The wife of the last sultan of Selangor spoke no English.

Q: Yes, I'm sure that's the case. When you first arrived, the emergency was on, too.

BYINGTON: I think it was still on when we left because there were several military camps that Homer was taken to visit where I was not allowed to go.

Q: There were certain parts of the country, but I think that the...



BYINGTON: Up by the Thailand border.

Q: You know that's still a problem?

BYINGTON: Yes.

Q: The overall emergency was lifted, I think, in 1960. It was while we were there, I remember. Or the travel restrictions were lifted enough that you could carry food in the car and some things like that that initially you couldn't do.

BYINGTON: No, I remember that because we were going to go down to Fort Dixon one time and take a picnic and go swimming. And we had not been told - this was early on. I suppose it never occurred to anyone that we were likely to go off picnicking. And when we got just outside KL, we were stopped. And in a perfectly courteous way, the policeman asked if we had any food. We said yes, we were taking a picnic. And again perfectly courteous he said, "I'm awfully sorry, but you can't take food out." I mean there was no harassment about it.

Q: No and it wasn't that they were singling you out at all.

BYINGTON: No. The road going over from KL to Rompin was supposed to go through one black area. And also the road coming up from Singapore.

Q: Um hum.

BYINGTON: But it was more up in the highlands really.

Q: Is there anything that you'd like to say just to sort of sum up your...

BYINGTON: Well, I'll give you one funny story about K[laughs] Speaking of the oddest things that have happened in each place, every time we gave a large party - did I tell you this?

Q: No, I don't think so.



BYINGTON: Well every time we gave a large party in KL we always blew out all the lights and the whole electrical establishment. And the administrative officer complained and complained about this. And they always came and switched them on promptly and we always blew them out again. And I know a little about electricity. So I knew what the problem was.

And one day I got the local - he was a little Chinese electrician - over. I asked him whether he had certain instruments. He said he did. I said to him, "Well we're going to re-wire the fuse box." And he just said, "Yes ma'am." So we got up on two stepladders and we did re-wire the fuse box. It's a question of A, B, and C currents and I won't go into the technicalities, but in any case, the next party we gave we didn't blow out the electricity and that was fine.

And the Electric Board, somebody called me up the next morning and said, "Mrs. Byington, you had a party last night and you didn't blow your fuses." And I said, "No, because I re-wired the fuse box." And he said, "What did you say?" And I said, "I re-wired the fuse box." And he said, "Oh, I understand you. You re-wired the fuse box." And I said, "Yes, that's what I told you." He said, "May I come out and see you?" And I said, "Well, yes." And so he walked in and he said, "You did say to me you re-wired the fuse box?" I said, "Yes, how many times do I have to tell you?" And he said, "Oh, what did you do?" So I told him I balanced AB and I balanced CB and I balanced AC. And once it was in balance they weren't going to blow anymore.

He said, "Do you realize by doing that you blew out the three embassies down the road, you blew out the power station?" [laughter] I said, "No, I didn't realize it. I've been complaining to you for a long time about the fact that this was not properly wired and it's your fault if you had it improperly wired all down the rest of the way. It's working all right for me." [laughter] They rapidly put in the new proper electrical system.

Q: All the way down the street! [laughter]

BYINGTON: An electrician would understand what I did. I sucked in more of certain other ones to get mine balanced and therefore there wasn't enough of those down the rest of the way.

Q: I thought that he was going to say to you that you undertook the money that the little man makes...[laughter]

BYINGTON: He could not believe that I technically was capable of doing what I said I'd done. [laughter] He knew it had to have happened, somebody had to have done it.

Q: But that you yourself had done it! Is there any one thing that you would like to sort of say in summing up, talking about your experience in the Foreign Service?



BYINGTON: I would just say it was all great fun from beginning to end. Naturally it had its disagreeable moments, moments when I got furious. But those were few and far between. I can remember them, but... It was royally... It was so much more stimulating than anything that is happening to my grandchildren that are here in the States. It was more... There were more things we could do.

Q: There is a sense of participation I think that I miss when I'm at home. Even if one is participating in a very peripheral level.

BYINGTON: Well I was trying to think of various friends of mine who married into the civilian life here in the U.S. Perhaps one of the things was the fact that, at least as far as I was concerned, I was much more wrapped up in the things that my husband was doing. If I had married a doctor or a lawyer here, he would have taken out somebody's tonsils or gotten somebody a divorce, but it wouldn't have had any effect on me one way or another. Whereas the then life in the Foreign Service, unless you were an absolute dumbbell, it would have been very difficult not [to] have participated in the official life.

Q: Um-hum. And all the pleasures and so on that came with it.

BYINGTON: Yes. It wasn't a question of someone coming home in the evening and saying, "Oh, I've had an awful day at the office. I'm so tired." They might come home and say that, but then you knew more or less what had been going on. They'd been having trouble with visa frauds or whatever it might have been.

Q: Well thank you very much. I appreciate this.

Would you expand on who they served under a little bit and how that made a difference? I know what you're [going to] say, but I'd like to have what your view of...

BYINGTON: Well I happened - I think I was more than fortunate. I only had one dull "chiefess." There was nothing bad or mean or anything like that. She just was dull. All the other women whom I served under were stimulating. In different ways, perhaps, but nevertheless people that it was interesting to be with. I do know other people who have had less fortunate experiences, either with people who were ill or themselves unhappy. In one or two cases, it's been some man's mother which removes them another whole generation up the scale. And surely that makes a difference to how they thought about their years in the Service.



Q: Certainly by the time I came along, people talked a certain amount about "dragon ladies." I guess that's a term that comes out of... Actually, I know what it comes out of. It comes out of "Terry and the Pirates" and so on. I guess what was meant was women who were martinets of some sort or another. My own feeling has been that the myth of the "dragon lady" was more potent than the real dragon ladies. That there were very few of them and that part of it was a difference in generation.

BYINGTON: Well, that's what I was saying about a man who had his mother with him. The man was already himself older than any given husband, or wives. And then he has his mother instead of a wife.

Q: And she was setting the social...

BYINGTON: Well she was his hostess, she was... Yes, she served him as an influence. I never happened - I know of two. I didn't have to serve under them so it didn't affect me.

Q: Just the stories went around.

BYINGTON: And then of course you occasionally have a situation...Well, one case was a man's sister who was living with him and acting as his hostess. He never married. She just happened to be there at that time and had her own life. So that she wasn't really terribly interested in the other wives. She had come to be with her brother because it was going to be an interesting social life for her, but what happened to the other women of the staff was really not her concern. Well, then you have another third situation now today when you have a woman ambassador. What do you do with the appendage who is husband?

Q: Well, what do you do with him and what doesn't get done in the post because she doesn't have a wife? [laughs]

BYINGTON: Well in that connection, we went over to stay with Mrs. Luce one time. We were in Madrid and she wanted to talk over something with Homer having to do with the Embassy and so she asked him if he would come over and it was all arranged. And everything couldn't have been pleasanter. And she was having several Italian officials, politicians for dinner that night and they were going to have their conference more or less with dinner and sit around afterwards.



So Henry was there at the time. And Henry and I in little front parlor, and we had drinks together and had a very nice dinner served to us. And of course he's a very - well, was a very important and interesting person. But he and I had no reason to be in that room together. I didn't know anything about his world business. He hadn't the faintest idea who I was or why I was there. And so after dinner we both looked at each other and said, "What are we doing here?" Said "Goodnight" and went to bed.

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## BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Homer M. Byington, Jr.

Spouse Entered Service:1930Left Service: 1973You Entered Service:sameLeft Service: same

Status: Widow of career Ambassador

Place and Date of birth: March 10, 1912, New York City

Maiden Name:Jane Craven McHarg

Parents:

Jane V. and Henry K. McHarg, coal miner, railroads, U.S. Navy



Schools: Holton Arms, Bennett, Washington College of Law

Date and Place of Marriage: Bedford, New York, September 21, 1932

Profession: Foreign Service Wife

Children:

Homer III

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At PostHospital work, Rome: Red Cross, Madrid

B. In Washington, DC- OSS

End of interview